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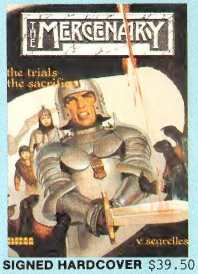

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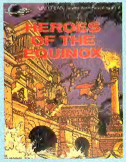

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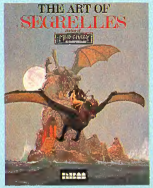

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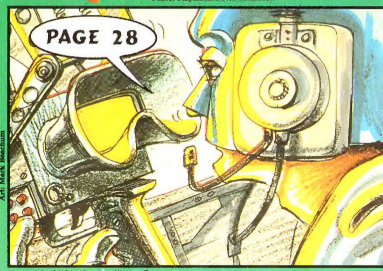

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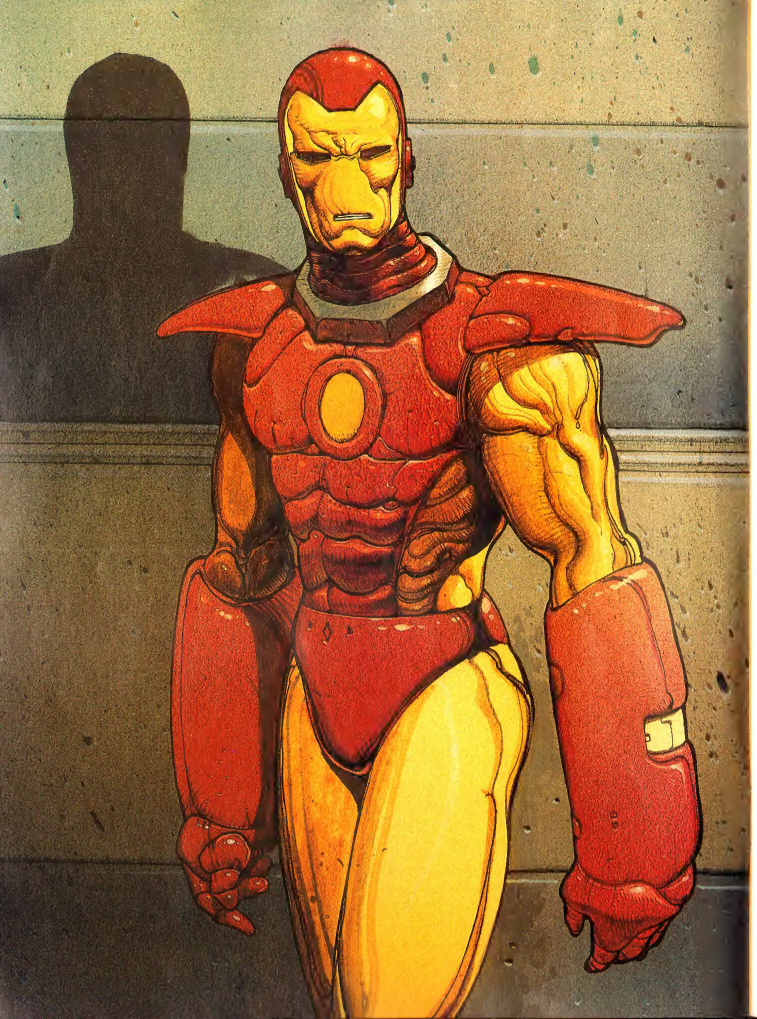
Subscriptions rates: $15.99 one year (6 issues) delivered in the U.S. and Canada. Foreign subscriptions: $21.99 in U.S. funds only. New subscriptions: send directly to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Avenue South, NY, NY 10016. Notification of change of address: send to COMICS SCENE Subscription Dept., P.O. Box 132, Mt. Morris, IL 61054-0132. POSTMASTER: Send change of address to COMICS SCENE Subscription Dept., P.O. Box 132 Mt. Morris, IL 61054-0132.



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WORD BALLOONS

Heroic Images

The man in black shirt and white skull on our cover is, of course, the Punisher. But he's a somewhat different looking guy than the fellow who has been killing off bad folks for years in various Marvel Comics. And that's because this Punisher is the work of artist Jean "Moebius" Giraud.

That's also true of the hero at left, a very polished Iron Man. Both of these terrific pieces are from a series of posters the artist is doing for Marvel, creating "his" versions of certain heroes (Spider-Man, Wolverine, Elektra, etc.). These posters will be on sale shortly at comics stores—and both images ended up here because I saw the originals. And fell in love.

It's a great feeling to hold original art, to turn it over in your hands and examine the brush strokes, the unerased pencil marks, the color texture, even the Zip-a-Tone. Studying up close—as I've been lucky enough to do—pieces by Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, Jim Steranko, Moebius and animators Chuck Jones and Richard Williams is a revelation. Forget selling the stuff; this is the *real* reason art galleries were created.

My friends Randy and Jean-Marc Lofficier, longtime STARLOG correspondents, showed me the Moebius poster originals—and those images just blew me away. I'm not particularly an Elektra fan, but I wanted that art on *my* wall . . . in *my* apartment . . . as soon as possible.

Coincidentally, at COMICS SCENE, we were already planning this issue's interviews with writer Carl Potts and actor Dolph Lundgren, a sort of back-to-back view of the Punisher. Plus, we had been discussing a piece on *Lt. Blueberry*, the epic Western saga created by Jean-Michel Charlier (who, sadly, has just passed away at presstime) and Jean Giraud. Epic is publishing *Blueberry* in spectacular American editions, complete with new translations by Randy & Jean-Marc.

But we didn't have *a cover* for this COMICS SCENE. And there was that great Moebius Punisher art. It featured a character discussed in two stories this issue yet drawn by an artist showcased in another. So, why not put *that* on the cover? As Managing Editor Dan Dickholtz might say, "Using one piece of art to represent three different cover stories is so crazy, it . . . just . . . might . . . work."

So it does. I should note that Moebius' Punisher poster is even better than our cover indicates. For one thing, there's no type plastered on it, obscuring the art. For another, there's a different background color, the one Moebius intended. We had to switch background tones due to obscure printing/color separation reasons that I can't pretend to understand or like. The original is better.

To give you an idea how much better, glance left. There's Iron Man *without* any silly type and *with* the original Moebius background. This is my other favorite of the Moebius poster series. We had planned to run Iron Man on page 69 or 70 in the Comics Reporter section, much smaller, two inches wide or a bit more than four, but the art's just too nice for those small potatoes. So, we killed an ad—yes, we did—and ran Iron Man in full-page glory opposite.

The Punisher is also just debuting as the star of one of Marvel's brand-new black & white magazines. The others are *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (the popular film series explored frequently in our sister magazine FANGORIA) and *The Destroyer* (based on the bestselling NAL paperback series created by Warren Murphy & the late Richard Sapir).

Well, it so happens that longtime STARLOG/COMICS SCENE contributor Will Murray (who previews the exciting *Green Hornet* series, with that great Steranko cover, on page 39) is the current author of the NAL Destroyer novels. Will has just begun writing the Destroyer's comics exploits (illustrated by artist Lee Weeks and others). As a veteran Destroyer fan, I recommend both paperback and comics series. This is terrific adventure fiction with more than a touch of satire.

All this death-dealing may have a further future connection. For the premiere issue of our magazine devoted to the action-adventure genre, Warren Murphy & Will Murray teamed to write the *first*-ever Destroyer short story, "Terminal Philosophy." That yarn's in ALL-STAR ACTION HEROES #1 (still on sale; issue #2 is due in December). And curiously, even now, Marvel Comics is considering adapting the Murphy-Murray tale in an upcoming edition of *The Destroyer*.

Sooner or later, if you keep hanging around, it all comes full circle.

—David McDonnell/Editor

COMICS SCENE RETURNS just in time for Halloween. Expect a few surprising graphic horrors. And sit back as **Arnold Schwarzenegger** explains just why he *won't* be reporting for war movie duty as **Sgt. Rock**. All this and more headlines **COMICS SCENE #10, on sale October 24, 1989.**

COMICS SCENE

Star Trek Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1989 Paramount Pictures

Star Trek Art: James W. Fry/Arne Starr/Courtesy DC Comics

Continuing Mission

He may have saved the galaxy once again at *The Final Frontier*, but the *Enterprise*'s captain might not be able to save himself. Explains Peter David, the commander of DC's newest *Star Trek* series, "For the next year or so, we're going to be playing off of the Klingon Ambassador's statement in *Star Trek IV* that there will be no peace while Kirk lives.

"We're essentially casting the Klingon Emperor in an Ayatollah Khomeini role. He's going to issue a statement that anyone who brings in Kirk's head will be given wealth beyond imagining and all kinds of power. In addition, we're introducing a race of space-going religious fanatics called the Nasgul who also want Kirk's head on a platter. What's going to happen is that the Nasgul and the Klingons are going to get into a bidding war. So, suddenly, the *Enterprise* is going to be flying around with a giant target painted on the saucer section.

"In the meantime," David notes, "all this lunacy starts to affect Kirk's ability to function because planets, upon learning that the dreaded Captain Kirk is on board the ship, don't want to deal with the *Enterprise*. It's as if Salman Rushdie came to your house and asked if he could stay a week, you would go, 'Naw, gee, I don't think so.'"

Even the crew Kirk took on his previous voyages will have nothing more to do with him. Among those replacing Bearclaw, Konom, Bryce and the other Starfleet personnel introduced in the last series will be an overly self-effacing security officer, Ensign Futon, and Kathy Li, "a potential love interest for Sulu." ("George Takei read the scene they meet in and thought it was a riot," says David.) And since "no matter where Kirk goes, he's pissing people off, onto the ship comes Protocol Officer R.J. Blaise, who is this unbelievably good looking, drop-dead female. And Kirk immediately feels he's going to be able to handle her, counting on his many years of classic womanizing to carry him through, and he finds that he *can't*. So, we're going to have some real sparks flying between them."

Promises Peter David, who has been joined on this Trek by his own new crew members, penciller James W. Fry and inker Arne Starr, "What's going to be happening is lots of fun and games."

—Daniel Dickholtz

In Too Deep

An American nuclear submarine sinks into a trench in the ocean floor while chasing something that couldn't have been designed by anyone on the surface, pulling a deepsea mining team and a group of Navy SEALs in after it. Moviegoers everywhere can't help but find themselves drawn into the ever-deepening mystery of filmmaker James Cameron's latest thriller. And writer Randy Stradley and artist Mike Kaluta are determined to get to the bottom of it all by taking their own two-issue movie adaptation plunge into *The Abyss*.

Abyss Art: Mike Kaluta/Courtesy Dark Horse Comics/Copyright 1989 20th Century Fox

Art: Chris Warner/Courtesy Dark Horse Comics

Bloodlust at First Sight

They've each slaughtered hundreds in their movies and massacred thousands in their own comic-book mini-series. But, just when it looked like there was no one left to kill, they found each other. Thanks to writer Randy Stradley and artist Phillip Norwood (whose film work includes *The Abyss* and *RoboCop II*), the *ALIENS* finally get to take on the *Predator* for three editions of *Dark Horse Presents*, starting with #34, and three subsequent issues of another full-color mini-series.

Predator, ALIENS Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1989 20th Century Fox

Planet of the Apes Characters: Copyright 1989 20th Century Fox

Planet of the Apes Art: Jim Somerville/Courtesy Adventure Comics

Comics of the Apes

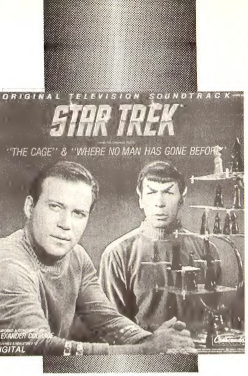
If blowing the Earth out from under them couldn't stop those sinister simians from making this world a *Planet of the Apes*, then how could anyone have expected the comics industry to be safe from their gorilla fighters for long? Already, Malibu Graphics has surrendered their Adventure Comics line to the Ape forces, agreeing to turn out an all-new ongoing series that won't monkey around with the continuity of the original films. Kent Burles, the writer/artist of *Adventurers*, will illustrate it, but a writer, at presstime, had yet to be captured.

Art: Dan Spiegle/Todd Kurosawa/Courtesy Marvel Entertainment

Rabbit's II

Maroon Studios is back in business, but Roger Rabbit won't be. He has already been fired for refusing to make the newer, cheaper, limited animation cartoons that R.K.'s brother C.B. Maroon wants to churn out, and somebody has arranged it so Roger will never work in Toontown again. His old pal Eddie Valiant could probably figure out who's trying to ruin this Toon, but Eddie has been kidnapped! Can anything make matters worse? How about *The Resurrection of Doom*? Bob Foster, Dan Spiegle and Todd Kurosawa reveal who's framing Roger Rabbit this time in a Marvel graphic novel that goes on sale in late September.

Roger Rabbit Art & Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1989 The Walt Disney Company & Amblin Entertainment



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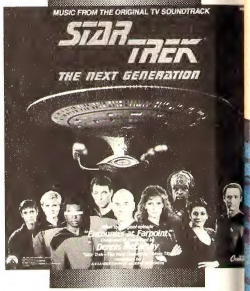

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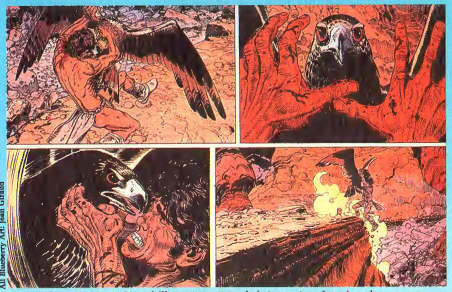
THE WILD (FRENCH) WEST

Lt. Blueberry is back in the saddle again.

By PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL

European writers, artists and directors who grew up watching Westerns as kids wanted to tell a Western story that they would enjoy as adults," says Epic editor Margaret Clark of the Old World's love for this quintessential American genre. In the mid-1960s, as Sergio Leone was reviving worldwide interest in the Western through his films starring Clint Eastwood, two Frenchmen—Jean-Michel Charlier and Jean Giraud (better known as Moebius)—were putting that European style to work on a Western comic series: *Lt. Blueberry*.

"That's what Charlier and Moebius were doing, rediscovering the American West from a European standpoint," Clark continues, "telling different kinds of stories, more adult stories, than Americans were used to. It's a West that is not, as the current term puts it, 'blow-dried.' It's much more earthy, more the way the Europeans felt it must have *really* been."



All Blueberry Art: Jean Giraud

A test of spirit as Jean Giraud illustrates a struggle between two American icons.

Blueberry began when Charlier was approached to write a Western comic strip, but declined, saying he really wasn't interested at the time. "Then, the opportunity came up for him to actually visit the American West," Clark notes. "He went, saw the scenery and became bitten by the whole idea of doing a Western. He had approached one artist, Jije, who wasn't interested, but Jije did have a young apprentice who was: Jean Giraud."

Charlier and Giraud's stories were published in the French magazine *Pilote*, under the title "Fort Navajo." Eventually, one particular character began to stand out, a man with an unusual name. "The most popular character turned out to be Blueberry, who was actually named for a reporter with a fondness for blueberry jam who made the Western trip with Charlier," says Clark. "As Blueberry got more popular, Charlier was stuck with a hero with a dopey name. So, he decided Blueberry's real name is Mike Donovan, and came up with a back history for the Blueberry nickname."

Now, Marvel's Epic imprint is publishing the first American editions of the collected adventures of Lt. Blueberry, with Clark as American editor. The translations are by Jean-Marc and Randy Lofficier, who act as Moebius' U.S. agents (and have also served as STARLOG correspondents). The series will not begin with the earliest "Fort Navajo" stories, but after Donovan has been well-established as the saga's lead.

"The story picks up in our first book [*Chihuahua Pearl*] with Blueberry returning to the fort and he comes across a Mexican patrol pursuing someone onto American territory," Clark says. "He scares the patrol off, but not before the man being pursued dies in a horse fall. Blueberry finds among the dead man's things a letter to President Grant and gets caught up in a *Mission: Impossible*-like deal to recover a half-million dollars in gold that the Confederate government had smuggled into Mexico near the Civil War's end."

Some Americans may be surprised to discover a Western written and drawn by two Frenchmen, probably as astonished as movie audiences of the mid-1960s were by Western films directed by an Italian. Clark points out that the French attitudes toward the American West are somewhat different from what most U.S. citizens have grown up with. "The French aren't caught up in our traditional movie plot of the hero riding into town, beating up the bully, kissing the schoolmarm, saving the town and then riding out," she says. "They don't feel bound by it, they're more open to telling a more complex kind of story. They're even, perhaps, more historically accurate than what an American would do. An American thinks, 'I know what a Western is: You ride in, you shoot some people, you run across Billy the Kid, you ride out.' The French are a little more cautious."

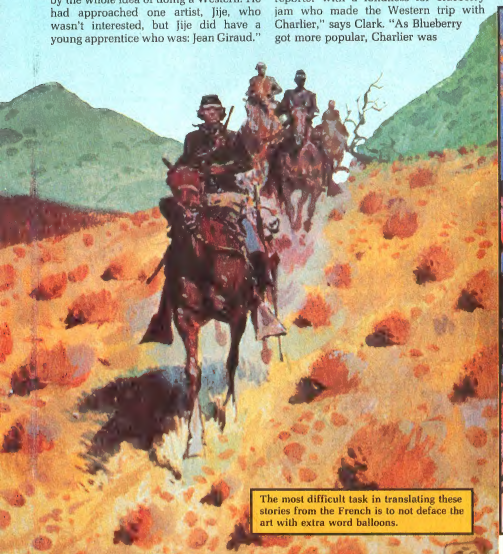
In part, that caution, at least as far as *Blueberry* is concerned, may arise from Charlier's early career. Charlier came to comics writing after a turn as an airline pilot and as a documetary reporter. Why would someone with a journalist's background gravitate to comics? The answer, says Clark, is the contrast between American and European comics.

"The main difference between Europe and the U.S. is that graphic albums and comics are treated as a mainstream publishing field," she notes. "They're aimed at many different levels and a graphic volume such as Moebius does is aimed at an adult audience, not 13-year-olds but an age range from college students to businessmen in suits."

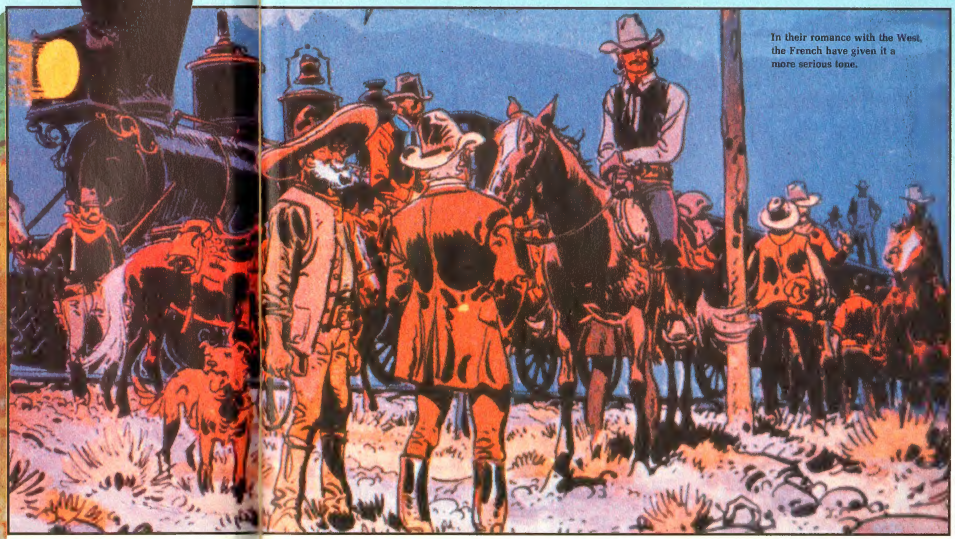
She recalls a recent incident that drives the point home. "When the *Silver Surfer* comic that Moebius did with Stan Lee (CS #4) was published in France, the president of France, Francois Mitterand, did an interview talking about the importance of graphic albums," Clark says. "The concept of George Bush being asked, 'What have graphic novels done for American culture?' just doesn't occur to anyone here. The Europeans treat their stories and artwork differently."

Giraud is best known in the States under his Moebius pseudonym and for his science fiction (CS #3). According to

Inspired by a man with a penchant for jam, Lt. Blueberry does have a *real* name.



The most difficult task in translating these stories from the French is to not deface the art with extra word balloons.



In their romance with the West, the French have given it a more serious tone.

All Blueberry Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1989 J.M. Charlier & Jean "Moebius" Giraud

All Blueberry Art: Courtesy Starwatcher Graphics/Epic Comics

One obstacle facing the Western's revival is the role played by the American Indian.

Clark, that isn't true in Europe: "*Blueberry* is probably Moebius' most popular work, although in France, it is done under the name 'Gir.' Jean is very eclectic: Moebius is the name he reserved for his science-fiction work, the stories he was writing himself."

Many a reader has probably wondered exactly what an editor does on a project like *Blueberry*. After all, the story is complete, the art is complete—even the coloring is already done. Clark says she winds up being something of a production chief on this kind of project.

"*Blueberry*, like the other Moebius books, is basically a production headache for me," she laughs, with a touch of a groan. "I have to check all the film to make sure all four plates are there—on one *local* book, we got two red plates instead of one of the other three—and then I have to have mechanicals made for the book. They are also different sized pages from American standards, so you must make sure that the artwork fits properly."

If Blueberry survives a market full of mutants, other cowpokes may saddle up on the four-color range.

Ironically, the Blueberry stories are more historically accurate than most of their American counterparts.

Translation can lead to production woes as well. "Sometimes, English is much wordier than French," Clark notes. "For me, that's a problem—we're restricted by the size of the French word balloons. I don't want to obscure any more of Moebius' artwork; I want to fit that square peg in the round hole, make the American type fit in the French space. Then, the lettering must be stetted to fit in the balloons. In addition, Moebius just wrote his captions over the open skies in his panels, so we have to box the captions to obscure the French lettering. Then, we have to pick a color for the caption box that looks right against the rest of Moebius' work."

Like the previous Epic editions of Moebius' work, Clark says that the *Blueberry* translations should be the best English language versions of these stories to date. "Both Randy and Jean-Marc speak French and English fluently—English is Jean-Marc's second language; French is Randy's—so they have a working knowledge of the idioms of both languages. That means their translations don't have the stilted sound that many others do.

"My assistant and I try to make it look seamless, that we didn't put in any work. *Lt. Blueberry* should look essentially the same as the original, but in English."

Additionally, there are text pages to be prepared. Clark says the second volume in the *Blueberry* series will contain some treats for both Moebius fans and art students. "In the second book, we have background information about Charlier and Moebius," she explains. "*Blueberry* was originally serialized in France, so Jean had the opportunity to redraw some panels when it was collected. We present his input on those changes: 'The face on the first version was better, but the coloring on this one is better.' Each of our books is the equivalent of two French volumes."

(continued on page 68)

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THE QUEEN OF COUNTRY SWING

Is any man a match for Honkytonk Sue?

By JAMI BERNARD

Forty-two years ago, the wide open spaces of the West spawned cartoonist Bob "Boze" Bell—that's "Boze" as in Bozo, something to do with high school sports fumbling. Bell, in turn, after playing many a late-night drum set at a succession of no-account bars to support his way through college, fathered Honkytonk Sue, a quick-as-a-whip slice of comic-strip womanhood who abides, at least in her new Eclipse graphic novel, by three rules of thumb: "I don't do drugs, I don't do married men, and I don't do windows."

She does plenty else, though, like making mincemeat of fat-ass cowboys who sass her and taking home the ones who catch her eye. *The Man Canyon*, the continuation of Honkytonk Sue's risque adventures in the modern West, is—as the Boze likes to tell it in his pleasant drawl—"about human relationships, coyotes and abortion. Hopefully, this book will offend *everyone*."

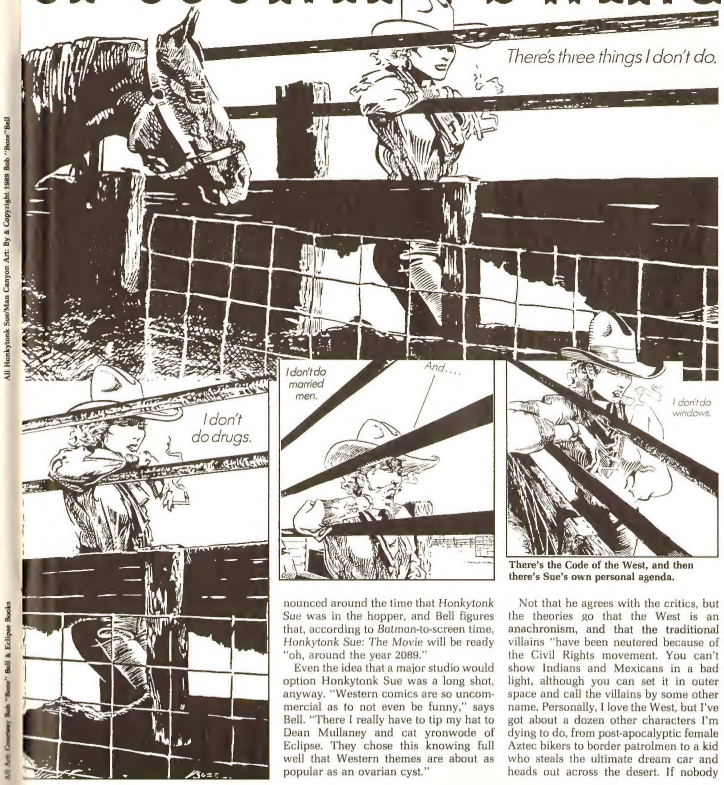
Less offensive, however, than humorous, Honkytonk Sue will forsake her usual run of wild one-night stands at the honkytonks in this graphic novel in order to deal with some more immediate problems: her best friend, Donna Jean, has gone religious on her, coyotes are eating her pet cats, and Sue finds herself giving as much attention to abortion as the Supreme Court did.

"I wanted to do a story that *no* TV writer or screenwriter would touch in a million years," says Bell from his home in Kinman, Arizona. "I wanted to avoid the ordinary. Basically, my premise was: If you can show it on TV or in the movie theater, why even bother to do in a graphic novel? I wanted to do something they *wouldn't* touch with a 10-foot option."

Aside from the glory of being a rebel, Bell was perhaps motivated by the miserable memories of a long chapter in his life that one could call "The Optioning of Honkytonk Sue," a nine-year exercise in frustration that began when Columbia Pictures optioned Sue for a movie during the *Urban Cowboy* craze in 1980. Goldie Hawn was signed up to star and executive produce. Life was heaven.

Then, life was hell. Columbia's interest trailed off as various screenwriters, including Larry (*The Last Picture Show*) McMurtry and Bell himself, came and went. Under McMurtry, one of Bell's personal heroes, Sue was "an entirely different character. She was married, had two kids, was insecure, a singer—all things which to me were the *antithesis* of the character." The project sank into the quicksand of Hollywood's Almost-Was graveyard. In fact, Bell remembers the long-gestating *Batman* first being announced around the time that *Honkytonk Sue* was in the hopper, and Bell figures that, according to *Batman*-to-screen time, *Honkytonk Sue: The Movie* will be ready "oh, around the year 2089."

Even the idea that a major studio would option Honkytonk Sue was a long shot, anyway. "Western comics are so uncommercial as to not even be funny," says Bell. "There I really have to tip my hat to Dean Mullaney and cat yronwode of Eclipse. They chose this knowing full well that Western themes are about as popular as an ovarian cyst."



All Honkytonk Sue/Man Canyon Art: By & Copyright 1989 Bob "Boze" Bell

There's the Code of the West, and then there's Sue's own personal agenda.

Not that he agrees with the critics, but the theories go that the West is an anachronism, and that the traditional villains "have been neutered because of the Civil Rights movement. You can't show Indians and Mexicans in a bad light, although you can set it in outer space and call the villains by some other name. Personally, I love the West, but I've got about a dozen other characters I'm dying to do, from post-apocalyptic female Aztec bikers to border patrolmen to a kid who steals the ultimate dream car and heads out across the desert. If nobody

All Art: Courtesy Bob "Boze" Bell & Eclipse Books

else wants to do it, then *I* want to do it. What's the point of copycatting superheroes or something that has been done for 40 years?"

The character of Honkytonk Sue came about almost by accident. Bell was writing stories sporadically for *National Lampoon* when he sent in six possibilities for comic strips. Naturally, his first idea was the one he wanted to do most—"a neutron man who kills people but leaves the buildings standing"—but he padded out the list to show his range. At the end of the page, he sketched out a Western woman, gave her the name of Honkytonk Sue, and mailed it off. *Lampoon* commissioned four pages of Sue as a one-shot, and that was that.

Until Bell started writing for an area counterculture paper, *The New Times Weekly*. A local leather shop wanted to bankroll a newspaper strip and discarded all of Bell's other suggestions. The leather boss had seen Honkytonk Sue in the *Lampoon*, and it had been love at first sight.

Not that surprising, since Sue is not only "The Queen of Country Swing," which is part of her Bell-given moniker, but she is also one foxy babe. She has the blue, slightly cloudy eyes of Michelle Pfeiffer ("Well, I didn't plan that, but I don't mind the coincidence," says Bell), and she knows how to handle herself. In one of the four comic compilations Bell has published, a cowboy cutting a rug with Sue says, "Ah declare, Sue. Yer th' best in th' West. *Bar none!*" To which she replies, "Why thanks Billy, but what d'ya think about my *dancin'*?"

The newspaper strip got a lukewarm response, until Bell trundled out Donna Jean, an ample woman with enough spare tires to send a semi to the North Pole. "I just needed someone for Sue to talk to. I was playing in a honkytonk band one weekend, and I brought a sketchbook, and on my break, I found myself drawing a fat woman who was sitting by the bar. The response was immediate because men can relate to it; they go to a bar, and there's an attractive woman with a fat friend, it's a universal truth. And women can relate, because sometimes they have a friend who's really beautiful, and it's painful to go to a bar with them and just sit there while they get all the attention. Frankly, I've never met a woman who wasn't secretly convinced she needed to lose 10 pounds, at least at some point in her life; I don't care if it's Michelle Pfeiffer or Queen Elizabeth. I hit on it by accident, and from that moment, *Honkytonk Sue* was really born."

Donna Jean is just as horny a babe as Sue, though she gets fewer results. In one of the four original *Honkytonk Sue* comic books, Sue decides that all Donna Jean needs is a good, uh, night of *fun*, to take her mind off her crash diet. So, Sue hypnotizes a hunky guy to believe that everything he formerly thought of as fat is now thin and attractive.

"Have you ever been this far before?" asks the guy ("Folks round here call me Mister Studhoss"). "Not at this motel," says Donna Jean.

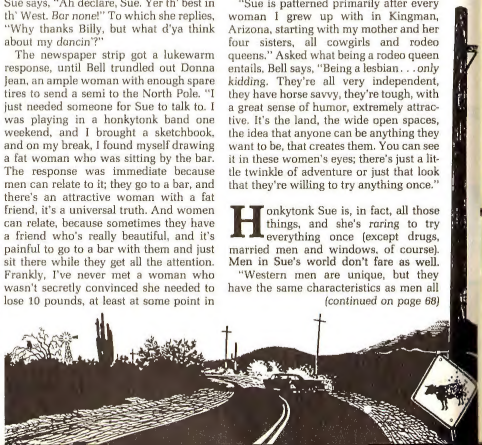
"Sue is patterned primarily after every woman I grew up with in Kingman, Arizona, starting with my mother and her four sisters, all cowgirls and rodeo queens." Asked what being a rodeo queen entails, Bell says, "Being a lesbian . . . only *kidding*. They're all very independent, they have horse savvy, they're tough, with a great sense of humor, extremely attractive. It's the land, the wide open spaces, the idea that anyone can be anything they want to be, that creates them. You can see it in these women's eyes; there's just a little twinkle of adventure or just that look that they're willing to try anything once."

Honkytonk Sue is, in fact, all those things, and she's *raring* to try everything once (except drugs, married men and windows, of course). Men in Sue's world don't fare as well.

"Western men are unique, but they have the same characteristics as men all

(continued on page 68)

"Western themes," admits Bell, "are about as popular as an ovarian cyst."



Lights! Camera!

TURTLES®

Those Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles will soon be slashing up the silver screen.

By T.L. JOHNS

The long-awaited, $15 million, live-action *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* is due for release in summer 1990, and "as far as we know, it's coming along pretty well," says the Turtles' soft-spoken co-creator, Peter Laird. "They've gone through the treatment and the screenplay. We saw the screenplay about a month ago and it was really good. The original writer Bobby Herbert is no longer associated with it.

"We know that they're constructing the sets in North Carolina at [the former] De Laurentiis Studios. [Although Golden Harvest is producing the film, space is being rented on De Laurentiis Entertainment land.] Steve Barron, the director, is down there now. They're building all the interior sewer sets."

Principal shooting was scheduled to start in New York City in mid-June, explains Laird, with a move to North Carolina slated for late summer. Post-production continues through spring 1990.

"The movie's coming out next summer now. Actually, that was the original plan. Then, they got really excited about it and wanted to put it out this year. We were really excited about that too, but in retrospect, it probably is better to wait and give them another six months to work on it rather than have the people at the Henson Shop [the Jim Henson company creating the Turtle costumes] being rushed. We want it to look as good as possible. And I think the director is also more comfortable with the extra time."

Fans of the comic will be happy to know that the movie's storyline follows the book more closely than the cartoons.

"It will *definitely* be much more like the comics. That was our feeling from the beginning. And when we met Steve Barron, *he* was clear that he was more interested in doing stuff closer to the books' spirit. In fact, most of the sequences are taken directly from the books, which is what we were hoping would happen."

But devoted cartoon watchers won't be left out in the cold, either.

"There are certain elements of the screenplay that refer to the animated Turtles and the toy Turtles. For example, in the movie, the Turtles will probably have different colored bandanas instead of the red ones we used."

Surprisingly, Laird reports that at first the script was heading toward an "R" rating but Laird and co-creator Kevin Eastman felt a large portion of the heroes' audience would have been turned away at theater doors. Now, all involved are looking for a "PG-13" rating.

"There was some discussion on whether or not it should get an 'R' rating for violence. But we felt and our agent felt strongly about it, and the director eventually came to see this, that it would be really foolish to do an 'R' because not only do many kids read the comics, but we've developed this huge audience for the Turtles among kids who maybe have only seen the animated show and bought the toys and sleep under Turtle bedsheets. To deny that audience access to the movie, or to limit their access, cuts out a complete segment of the population.

"The thing is, too, that we've never really gone for gross violence," Laird notes. "It's mostly violent action. You don't see people's eyes being gouged out or guts exploding. So, a 'PG-13' movie could be made that has a great deal of action and violence, but isn't gross and glory to the point of needing an 'R' rating. Director Steve Barron is creative enough and talented enough that he's going to be able to pull that off."

Turtles Graphic Novel Art: Kevin Eastman & Peter Laird/Copyright 1986 Fred Comics Inc.

Turtles Art Colors: Kevin Eastman/Ken Fabian/Jason Cohen

Instead of trying to do stop-motion with Playmates' toy Turtles, the producers have turned to Jim Henson's Creature Shop to bring screen life to the heroes in a half-shell.

Turtle Toys: Playmates

Trying to pull plotlines out of Laird isn't easy, but the film's basic story follows the Turtles' adventures in the New York City sewers. Their origin remains intact from the comic. They meet April, rescue her and become her friend. They also encounter Casey Jones, who becomes sort of an ally.

"The Shredder is there, Splinter is there, and there's a lot of action. The original screenplay had the mousers, little mechanical rat catchers from issue #2, but we decided to hold off on them until we see if there's going to be another movie. It's a conflict between Shredder and the Foot on one side and Splinter and the Turtles on the other. Casey and April are thrown in as 'human interest' almost to keep the audience interested in something besides Turtles."

While Laird says that at presstime, no one has been cast, he would prefer to see newcomers in the human roles.

"They've discussed a number of different people for April. The original name talked about was Phoebe Cates. I think because Golden Harvest had some kind of contractual thing with her. But they were also talking about Elisabeth [*Adventures in Babysitting*] Shue and Julie [*Earth Girls Are Easy*] Brown. I hope they don't use her. She's neat, but I think she would be too goofy."

As for the Turtles themselves, Laird isn't sure what the final outcome will be as far as actors, but he has a pretty good idea of what the audience can expect.

"They're all going to be unknowns. A few different people will play each Turtle. Maybe one can do better at acrobatics than the others or maybe one can act better than the others. Originally, there was some talk of getting famous names to do the voices, or even, God help us, having actual famous comedians in Turtle suits with their faces showing through, but we nixed that idea right away."

And yes, alongside Casey, April, Shredder, the Foot and Splinter will be "a couple of supporting characters written just for the movie." However, even those retained from the comic may yet undergo a few changes. April, for example, became a reporter for the Channel 6 News in the animated series. That job remains as do several other aspects of the cartoons, such as changes in ethnicity for April and Baxter Stockman.

"Well, April has always been of dubious ethnicity in the comics. She fluctuated from being very white to tan to semi-black then back to white. We've always just treated April as a woman. I've always thought of her as a girl with a good tan.

"Maybe it's because I've been living

April wonders who will portray her on the screen—Phoebe Cates (left), who dealt with *Gremlins*, or adventurous babysitter Elisabeth Shue? Maybe they'll get Jack Nicholson?

Color Photos: Ron Batchelor/Copyright 1987 The Jim Henson Entertainment Group

Silver Photos: Steve Jacobs

All Turtles Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1986, 1989 Mirage Studios.

with it for the last few years, but I really don't think the April on the cartoon is that much different from the April in the books. If you look at the first five issues, she changes her hairstyle in each of them. We were finding our way. When we were shown the original sketches of April at the animation studio, they gave her blonde hair, which was strange but it was something we could live with. It didn't seem to be a point to fight about.

"Baxter Stockman was obviously black in the comics; they made him this kind of Albert Einstein-looking guy. That was kind of strange too, but again, when we made him black, it wasn't like this guy *had* to be black for the story. He could have been white, Asian or *anything*. That's the attitude we took when they changed him for the cartoon. But, there's some momentary consternation over such a change.

"There are certain compromises that must be made," admits Laird, "and when you sit down and think about it, it makes sense because you're not dealing with machines that you can plug your ideas into and out comes a clone of what you did. You go to this animation studio where there are 10 people who have their own ideas and who want to inject that creativity into what they do. We can respect that, being creative people ourselves. It's hard to say all the time, 'No, do it *my* way.' The flipside of that is when you're like that, you don't get anything done. You start butting heads and the creativity dissolves and the energy level just dissipates.

"We could have stuck to our guns about how the Turtles look and said they couldn't eat pizza, and we probably would be sitting here with no Turtle toys on the shelves. That was hard to deal with at first, but we realized if you want something like this to happen, you *must* be able to bend. It's not that difficult once you get used to it and see its value."

Laird, Eastman and crew won't be physically working with Jim Henson's staff. "Henson's company is cooking away on the costumes. We have a half-hour videotape that they sent us of where they were in terms of development," Laird says. "It's really *neat*. They had the whole Turtle costume cast in foam latex and they had stuntmen wearing all or parts of the costume doing preliminary work, figuring out how to move in the costume and how to do the stunts. There was one guy, the sword guy playing Leonardo, and he was doing some moves that just looked amazing.

"They didn't have any articulated heads made yet, because they're going to do cable-operated expressions like eyes that move. It's still all unpainted foam and the two halves of the shell were put together with black electricians' tape. But to see this guy lounging around in his Turtle costume and just doing ordinary, day-to-day things, it was like seeing the comic books come to life."

Laird notes the movie credits will list himself and Kevin Eastman as creators, but he's not sure what else. However, whatever else is done, Laird and Eastman must approve it first.

"We get the stuff to see if it's OK, but most of the actual interaction is between the director, the producer and the Henson Shop. We're not actually getting in

(continued on page 50)

While the movie employs elements from the comics and the toys, Leonardo and the others' actions had to be toned down to escape an "R" rating.

THE PUNISHER™

Film Journal Entries

By MARC SHAPIRO

After all that beating up, shooting up and blowing up in other movies, Dolph Lundgren tries something "different."

Punisher Characters: Trademark & Copyright 1988 Marvel Entertainment Group
All Punisher Photos Copyright 1988 New World Pictures

What's in a name? If you're Dolph Lundgren considering a script, plenty.

"My first reaction to being offered *The Punisher* was that I *didn't* like the title too much," recalls Lundgren. "*The Punisher* sounded too much like *Terminator* or *The Exterminator*, and I didn't like the idea that I would get involved in that type of movie at this stage of my career."

Obviously, something must have changed Lundgren's mind since the actor, several days into his latest film *Dark Angel*, is waxing nostalgic about his role as Frank Castle in *The Punisher* (scheduled for summer-fall 1989 release, though it may go directly to video). Lundgren concedes that he did eventually come around to producer Robert Kamen and director Mark Goldblatt's way of thinking, but not before concluding that there was something to the role besides a salary.

"I didn't know *anything* about the Punisher," confesses Lundgren, "and my initial reaction was that I was being offered another of those same action-oriented films that I had been doing to this point. I was definitely concerned that it was just more of the same.

"But then, I read the script and I said, 'Wow! This is really good! The story is fine, there are some funny moments and many scenes of real dramatic potential.' So, I decided to do it."

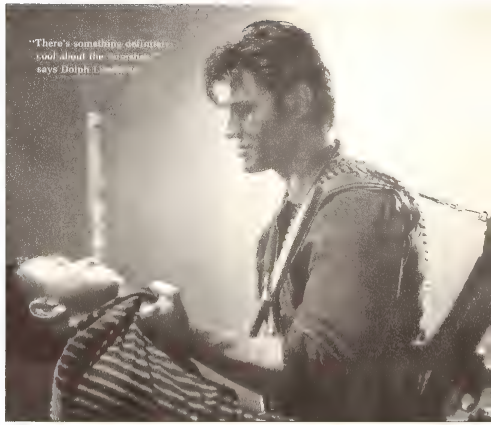
Lundgren, who grew up reading superhero comic books, explains that the character and the concept basically struck a nerve with him.

"There's just something very catchy about the Punisher that proved immediately attractive to me. I liked the idea of playing a character who really doesn't care about anything except getting revenge and dealing out the blow of justice. And while there's all sorts of action and really over-the-top characters and situations, there's a sense of realism about the whole thing that makes this more than just another action picture.

"The movie also has that shade and extra dimension that you don't see in most action films. This isn't just the Punisher killing everybody in sight. There's a carefully drawn background that gives the audience a legitimate reason for why he has become what he is. That appealed to me."

Lundgren, in previous interviews, has described *The Punisher* as "*RoboCop* meets *Lethal Weapon*." But, now reminded of that description, the actor amends the label.

"It's really hard to describe *The Punisher* in terms of being like other films," he says. "The *RoboCop* comparison might work because there's so much action involved. The beginning of *The Punisher* is more along the lines of a typical cop movie but then it becomes more like a James Bond movie with situations and characters that are totally larger than life."



Lundgren, through cutting out weightlifting and concentrating on martial arts and running, dropped 25 pounds in an attempt to physically become the character.

"Let's face it," he chuckles, "Frank Castle is a guy who has been living in the sewers for five years. He could *not* look too healthy and be believable."

The actor remembers that getting mentally into the character proved an even tougher task.

"I didn't feel that reading the comic books would give me *any* real insight into the character," he explains, "but I did read them just for fun. I tried to bring as much of myself as possible into Frank Castle. I'm a fairly innocent sort of tough guy and playing this character forced me to get pretty intense.

"And I accomplished that by acting like the Punisher would act. I stayed by myself a lot, walked around talking to myself and didn't talk to anybody. The result was that I put myself in a very tense frame of mind."

He stayed that way when *The Punisher* cast and crew began filming in Australia, and his continual mental training caused a number of anxious moments on the set.

"I guess I scared many people," he admits. "I know I was real weird some days. But, that's what it took to get into the character. Working 12 hours a day for three months helped me stay insane. It also didn't hurt that the dialogue and the scenes were written in a way that called for me to have an intense, yet detached attitude."

There were numerous conversations between Lundgren and producer Robert Kamen. "I had a say in the script [apparently rewritten by Kamen, though screenwriter Boaz Yakin says that only Yakin will be credited, see page 58] only in the sense of suggesting things that would be consistent with the character's motivation," Lundgren says. "Kamen was very receptive and I feel the talks we had ultimately resulted in a better movie."

And those results, explains the actor, can be seen in the scenes in which Castle relates to his family and, as the Punisher, when he talks to himself and God.

"I worked especially hard on making those scenes play real," says an outwardly proud Lundgren. "I know I've already been typed as an action actor, but I think those scenes will surprise people who think I can only act with some kind of weapon in my hand. I have aspirations as an actor in dramatic, non-action roles and I think those scenes will prove that I can carry it off."

But action, violent and brutal, is the Punisher's specialty, and Lundgren was more than willing to crash and burn for the film's rougher moments.

"I did about 95 percent of my own stunts," claims Lundgren. "I took some spills on the Harley when it goes crashing off the catwalk and I received some bruises in the scene where I drive the bus through the blockade. And the fight scenes we staged with those Japanese martial arts champions were all *very* real. These are proud people and it would have been an insult to ask them to pull their punches too far or to use inappropriate martial arts techniques."

The actor concedes, though, that much of his involvement in the stunt side of *The Punisher* was the result of his own boredom and hair-trigger temper.

"There's this scene where Frank does a 40-foot fall off the top of a building. My stunt double was supposed to do it, but I was pissed off about something that day, and so I said, 'What the hell, I'll do it.' Everything was cool until I stepped out on the edge and looked down. I thought to myself, 'You idiot, why did you volunteer to do this?' When I took that step off the ledge, I knew I was in for an awfully long drop."

Lundgren has his share of adventure in *Dark Angel*, a film he describes as an action-comedy. "I play this cop who screws up a drug bust and gets his partner killed in the process. While I'm trying to clear the whole thing up, aliens show up. Pretty weird, don't you think?"

But weird stuff that Lundgren explains will, like *The Punisher*, allow him to stretch as an actor.

After the torture of *The Punisher*, the actor hopes that casting directors will consider him for roles that don't require demolition as part of the audition.

"I have a girl friend in this film and get to crack a few jokes which takes me one more step away from stereotypical roles. I mean, I've fired a gun every way you can fire one and thrown every possible punch. If I want to grow in this business, I've got to do different things."

Things he had to put on the backburner with his first few major roles, beginning (after a brief appearance in *A View to a Kill*) with the Russian fighter Drago in *Rocky IV*.

"I felt Drago was a good first role for me even though the character was very one-dimensional and stereotyped. Working with Sylvester Stallone was a good time for me, and I learned quite a bit."

However, Lundgren has fewer kind words for his days as He-Man in *Masters of the Universe*.

"Playing He-Man was pretty much my lowest point as an actor," says the candid Lundgren. "It was a kids' movie. How much could I do as an actor when I was running around in swim trunks and chest armor? There was talk of my doing a second one, but I wasn't available, and from what I understand, the whole idea of a sequel fell through."

Things pretty much fell through with Lundgren's latest movie *Red Scorpion*, which came and went virtually unnoticed. It's now on video.

"That film had *many* problems," Lundgren admits. "It went $10 million over budget, there were lawsuits going back and forth over who got the final edit and there was some political heat involved. I've pretty much distanced myself from the film because it does have a South African connection."

On the other hand, he notes, "*Red Scorpion* is not a bad film. It has a ton of action in it and I basically feel being a part of it was a good experience for me."

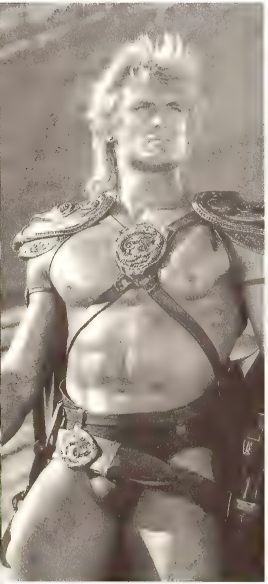
Lundgren feels equally good about his *Punisher* experience and believes, in a sense, he's acting out a fantasy by playing the character.

"There's something definitely cool about the Punisher. I was able to totally act out and, in the process, take out my own personal frustrations.

"In *Dark Angel*, I'm playing a character who's sort of a charmer and a tough guy, but Frank Castle is *definitely* a different case. He's strong yet he has been victimized. He's easily the most interesting character I've played in my career."

Lundgren plans on taking a break after completing *Dark Angel*, the better to let that film and *The Punisher* show casting people he's capable of something more than blowing up landscapes.

"But that doesn't mean I wouldn't do a second *Punisher* film," declares Dolph Lundgren. "I like Mr. P. He's a cool cat."



"Playing He-Man was pretty much my lowest point as an actor," admits Lundgren.

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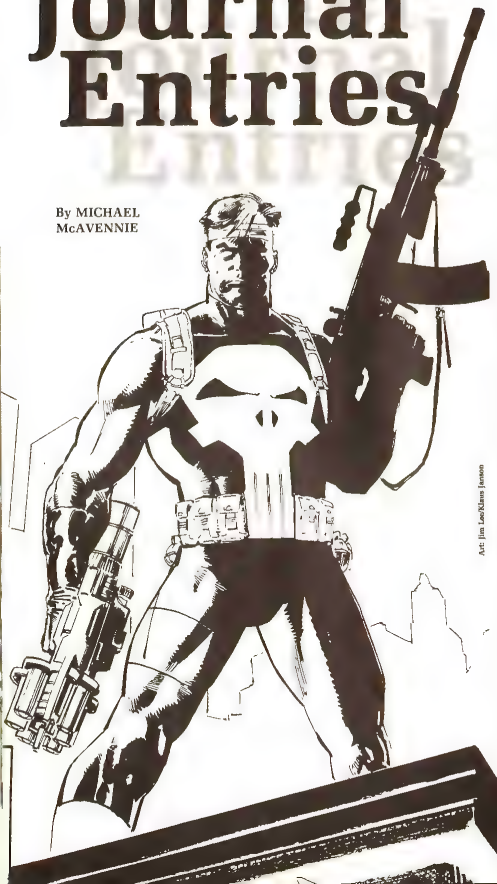
Writer Journal Entries

When the bullets fly, it's up to Carl Potts to keep the Punisher covered.

By MICHAEL McAVENNIE



Art: Jim Lee/Klaus Janson

I don't know why the Punisher is so popular," admits Carl Potts, consulting editor of *The Punisher* and *The Punisher War Journal*, for which he also serves as writer. "If you go by the track record of the last five to 10 years, to be one of the more popular characters in comics, you either had to be a superhero with super-powers or a mutant. The Punisher has *no* super-powers, and he's not a mutant.

"When the original *Punisher* limited series was proposed and I had decided to do it, many people thought the thing was going to go nowhere—just another limited series that wouldn't sell that well and would sink without a trace. It really took off, however, and it caught people unawares. You can Monday-morning quarterback and try to figure out why this, that and the other thing, but I don't know if anybody really knows why it suddenly took off like it did.

"Perhaps it's the fact that the Punisher has a pretty striking visual quality, which I think is better than most of the other characters that walk in the same territory as he does," Potts suggests. "Since he's done at Marvel, that helps generate more response. More people will give it a chance, since Marvel has a larger audience to try it with. It doesn't hurt that the ongoing *Punisher* book has had a really good writer for every issue in Mike Baron, and the several artists who've worked on the book have been really good. The latest new artist for *The Punisher* is Bill Reinhold from *The Badger*, and between Reinhold and [*War Journal* artist] Jim Lee, we'll have two of the best artists in the field on the books."

Potts recently gave up all his previous editing duties to oversee Marvel's Epic line, but his new position will not infringe upon his plotting or writing *War Journal*, which goes monthly with issue #11. He had planned to do breakdowns on the book, but was forced to abandon that idea when the title moved to its monthly status. "As time goes on, Jim Lee will probably end up contributing more plot element ideas," he adds. "In fact, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he ends up writing his own stories on whatever projects he's working on. Someday, he'll make a very good writer/artist, because he's very sharp in many areas."

As for the writer's current plans, *War Journal* #10, "Second Shot," will mark Sniper's return. The villain will reappear in France and West Germany to steal an Apache helicopter and deliver it for money to the East Germans.

Art: Jim Lee/Klaus Janson

Castle will soon come head to head with one of his few friends.

"Issue #11 features Ron, who last appeared in *War Journal* #8," says Potts, "and a rogue police Scared Straight program that goes haywire. The Punisher gave Ron a break last time—and the Punisher virtually *never* gives *anyone* a break—but he let Ron get away because of Ron's grandmother. He sees Ron has gone back to dealing, and just before the Punisher attacks, the cops arrest Ron. He goes into a boot-camp-type internment, and when he comes out, the Punisher must decide whether Ron has really turned around or if he's just jerking everyone's chain before he goes back to dealing. It's not an easy decision to make, and it will cause a rift between the Punisher and Microchip, who feels the Punisher shouldn't be going after Ron."

War Journal #12 will be a crossover with the "Acts of Vengeance" storyline, which begins in the *Avengers* books and ties into several other Marvel titles. According to Potts, the storyline focuses on a group of high-level criminals who manipulate other villains into battling heroes they haven't faced before. "To take out the Punisher," Potts says, "they're going to send Bushwhacker, and the two will face off in that issue.

"Spider-Man guest-stars in issues #13 and #14, which will deal with a neo-Nazi cult of terrorists taking over the *Daily Bugle* building. The Punisher and Spider-Man try to work together, despite their differences, tactics and outlook. [It's about] how their outlooks affect their actions and the ramifications when they're both going after the same thing."

With the number of guest stars that have already appeared in *War Journal*, some may wonder if this is the Punisher-based rendition of *Marvel Team-Up*. "*No way!*" Potts claims. "I don't *ever* want to use anybody gratuitously. I try to craft the stories so that all the plot elements relate to each other along a common theme. If we come up with somebody we think is really interesting to use, I'll try my best to craft a story around that person, but I don't say we need to use this, that or the other person in an issue and try to retrofit a story around it. It's whatever strikes my fancy at any given time."

Perhaps Potts' fancy was struck by the music of Don Ho or *Magnum, P.I.* reruns when he decided to feature the Punisher in Hawaii for issues #15-17. "A family that's friends with Microchip is vacationing in Maui when they inadvertently stumble onto a large plantation of marijuana zealously guarded by very militant drug growers," he explains. "All but one member of the family is killed or taken hostage. The Punisher is off on another mission at the moment, so when Microchip hears about it, he rushes to Hawaii to try and deal with the situation. Coming back from his mission, the Punisher visits Microchip at the New Jersey warehouse and discovers from clues left behind what's happening. He decides that he'll go off to help Microchip, who has gotten in over his head. The story will incorporate some aspects of Hawaiian history, elements of Hawaiian religion and magic.

"We've also got a couple of nice high-format hardbound *Punisher* graphic novels out this summer," he continues. "There's another one in the works now that won't be out for sometime, written by Chuck Dixon and drawn by Jorge Zaffino, who drew the very first *Punisher* graphic novel. Another one, *Intruder*, is done by Mike Baron and Bill Reinhold, and it looks just *incredible*. It opens up some information and aspects on Frank Castle's life before he was the Punisher that will be pretty startling to a few folks."

Potts describes Mike Baron's version of the Punisher as having "a slightly different approach to the character than mine. Mike has a different writing style, but I think they're fairly complimentary. I delve into the character's internal aspects and certain ramifications in a more blatant way than Mike. Many people think he doesn't deal with the character's internal things much at all, but in his own subtle way, he does. He doesn't explore it as obviously as I do.

"For instance," Potts adds, "when Microchip, Jr. was killed [*Punisher* #9], everybody thought that the Punisher was totally unfeeling because he just brought the body back, said, 'Sorry, 'Chip,' and walked off. In reality, if you know the

Beyond *War Journal* on the Punisher's hectic schedule is *Intruder* by Mike Baron and Bill Reinhold. It will have some interesting revelations about Mr. Castle's early life.

Art: Bill Reinhold

According to Potts, the Punisher is the patron saint of frustrated urban dwellers.

character at all, you'll realize that's the Punisher's defense mechanism. He has lost all the people in his life that he loved with the exception of Microchip, his only surviving real friend. Anybody he gets near to seems not to live very long. It's a *horrible* situation for somebody. To combat that, he often tries to keep people at a distance, to be cold, so that he doesn't set himself up to be hurt again. When he does let somebody get near him and they're killed, the only way he keeps functioning and remains alive is by shutting all of it out. He really isn't cold; he just knows that if he lets himself feel it, he'll fall apart. It'll bring back all the memories of his family and he'll be dead meat, a bubbling mass of protoplasm wide open for attack from all his enemies."

The Punisher has come a long way since he first appeared in *Amazing Spider-Man* #129. Noting there was more of a fantasy/superhero element involved when Gerry Conway and Ross Andru introduced the Punisher, Potts believes the character didn't really come into his own until artist/writer Frank Miller's first tenure with *Daredevil*. The Punisher had become much grittier and more realistic in relation to the rest of the Marvel Universe, which set the tone for his limited series and his ongoing book.

"He has made his situation a self-fulfilling prophecy," Potts says about the character's modernized outlook on life. "He's punishing *himself*, not just the criminals. He feels guilt over not protecting his family originally, and every time

All Punisher Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1989 Marvel Entertainment Group

Art: Jimmi Sherman

Art: Reed Anderson

Potts kept the comic adaptation of the movie very straight—nothing from the regular Punisher titles was added.

he goes to fight the bad guys, he beats them to vindicate himself for screwing up and not protecting his family. This is all subconscious. Much of it isn't clear to himself. If he ever gets himself hurt or killed, he's getting what he deserves for not protecting his family. It's an odd death wish in a way."

While the Punisher hunts down criminals to ease his troubled soul, Potts confesses that writing *War Journal* may be something of an outlet for his own aggressions. "It's possible," he explains, "although it's probably on a subconscious level. I like a variety of subject matters and different types of stories. As an editor, I've edited *The Punisher, Power Pack, Strikeforce: Morituri, What The . ?*, and everything in between, and I've enjoyed it. And, even though the book may be a bit of a catharsis for me, it's probably more so for the readers. There's a great deal of frustration in people, I think, particularly in people living in city environments like New York where the crime rates are high. You seem to be very susceptible to the whims of very strange people, and it's frustrating to see repeat criminals getting off easily and committing crimes over and over again. Reading about a character in comics or novels or seeing one on the screen who doesn't let that sort of thing happen is a catharsis."

The writer also believes that such a catharsis makes characters like the Punisher and Wolverine among the most popular in the Marvel Universe, despite the fact they are cold-blooded killers. "It seems to have been the case for some years now," he says. "In the '60s and early '70s, they didn't seem to be the type of characters who were most popular. It was more like Spider-Man. The overall view at that time was that they were peace-loving hippie types. Now, it's punks and skinheads. The pendulum of public taste may yet swing again.

"I really try to emphasize in both books, especially in *War Journal*, that the Punisher is *not* a character anybody should be emulating," Potts says, confessing to having some worries about the adoration of such characters. "All he does is go around fighting other horrible people; his personal life, whatever little of it there is, is a shambles. When he gets done with the job, he has no real feeling of satisfaction. It's only the guilt gnawing at him to go on to the next job. He can't sit back, relax, have a Bud, and say, 'Hey, that was a great job. We did good.' He does nothing really constructive, and he doesn't solve any of his long-term problems, no matter how many drug dealers or murderers he takes out. I think if people see that in the story, they'll realize this is *not* someone they want to emulate.

"Occasionally, I'll get letters that say, 'Yeah! Kill more people! More blood and guts!' " he adds. "If it's one that really gets to me, I'll even send a personal response back and tell the reader, 'You're missing the point. Wake up and smell the coffee.'

"I am a strong believer in personal responsibility, however. You see all kinds of excuses being made for anti-social actions by people. It's like, 'Oh, they were exposed to this or that.' Anybody who has an intelligence above being mentally retarded should be able to be *responsible* for his own actions. No matter what kind of environment you're raised in, you know that if you hit somebody over the

Art: Steve Rude

head, it's going to hurt them. It's not a healthy thing to do. You wouldn't like it yourself, so you shouldn't be doing it to other people. That's a basic concept for which everyone should be held accountable and responsible. To say some kid saw a movie [Fuzz] where a guy poured gasoline on somebody and put a match on him, and that the *movie* is responsible for the kid going out and emulating it, is ridiculous. The person who would do that in real life is obviously so disturbed to begin with that something somewhere was eventually going to set him off."

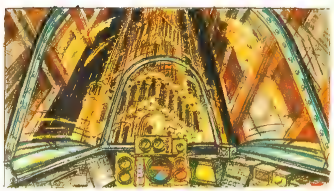
Just what else does the future hold for the character who Potts believes should *not* be emulated? With *The Punisher* movie, starring Dolph Lundgren (see page 20), currently awaiting the go-ahead for release, so is the writer's adaptation of the film, which is drawn by Brent Anderson. According to Potts, the toughest part of translating the movie onto the comics page was a matter of condensing all of it into the book's format. As for whether or not he wanted to inject some of his characterization into the surprisingly different screen version of the Punisher, he explains, "That wasn't my job. I felt it was my job to present the movie version. Since there were also a number of different drafts of the screenplay, we never knew for sure what the final one was going to be like, and that caused a few problems over there [at New World]. All in all, however, I think it was a pretty faithful adaptation."

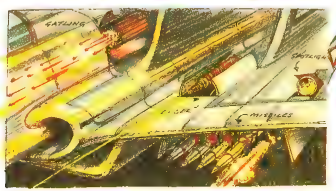
With two monthly comics, a black & white magazine, several graphic novels, numerous appearances throughout other Marvel titles, and now a movie, does Carl Potts believe there's *too much* Punisher out there? "You have to judge each item on its individual merit," he says. "If they're good stories with good artwork, then I don't think so. If you start producing a lot of substandard material, then I think you have too much. Another way you can look at it is that if people are continuing to buy it, then you're obviously *not* putting out too much, and, judging by the present quality and sales, I really don't think we're doing too much *Punisher*."

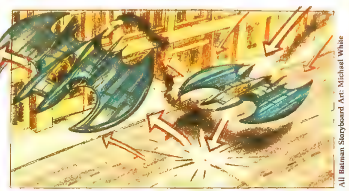
Paper Bats

By ADAM PIRANI

Pinning Batman to his storyboards, artist Michael White considers how to dispose of a Dark Knight.







All Batman Storyboard Art: Michael White

Artist Michael White's storyboarding talents come into play in the planning and filming of the Batwing's explosive flight.

Making a big-budget special FX movie like *Batman* involves a mass of complications. Even on a mainstream movie, filmmakers don't just take a camera on to the set and say, "OK, we'll start at the first scene in the house, film that, then move on to the next scene at Niagara Falls." Sets must be built. Actors' schedules must be timetabled efficiently. Careful planning is required.

On an adventure movie like *Batman*, which takes place in a less realistic world, the problems multiply. How are buildings 700 feet tall shown? *Which* special effects should be used in this particular sequence—miniatures? Blue screen? Mattes? When Batman and Vicki Vale fall from the bell tower, what *precisely* should be shot?

In order to answer these questions in advance, filmmakers use storyboards, sequences of illustrations that tell the story visually. Storyboards can be drawn before any expensive sets are built, before any expensive effects are filmed, before any expensive days of shooting begin.

All Batman Art & Poster Courtesy Warner Bros. Poster: Keith Hampshire

His storyboards are "really a paper run of the film, shot for shot," White says. They allow the filmmakers to study the *entire* movie and make inexpensive changes—often before one frame of film is exposed.

With the storyboards as a visual reference and blueprint, the moviemaking process can proceed efficiently.

"It's really a paper run of the film, shot for shot," says Michael White, *Batman*'s storyboard artist. A veteran of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, *Superman IV*, *High Spirits*, *Gandhi* and many other movies, White's contribution to *Batman* has been to provide a (frequently updated) visual interpretation of the script at the production's base at England's Pinewood Studios.

"This is a way of showing what all those elements could be in achieving a shot," he notes. "What you're looking at here [published on pages 30-31] is the very end of the film, where people fall off the cathedral tower. That is split up very carefully into traveling matte shots, and you can see there's an insert shot of a hand firing a gun; you can see that the shots can be picked up on anybody's waist any time, in any place. It could be anybody's hand, as long as he's wearing the Batman costume.

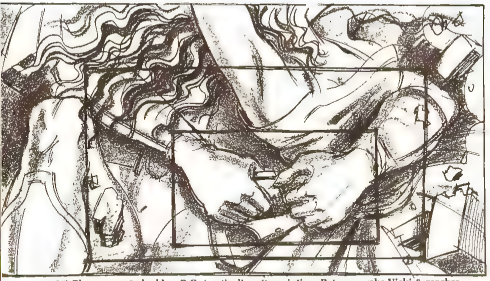
"The very first picture [26] shows the ledge breaking away and people dropping out of shot. The next drawing down [27] shows Batman has grabbed hold of the girl, he's reaching into his Bat-belt, which is always of good use, and will always get him out of trouble; and as they fall away [28], he lifts the gun to fire. You see [29] what it is he's going to fire at—which of course is the tower—as they fall away from it. This [30] then brings you back to the hand, firing the gun; next [31], there is a picture of the results of the grappling hook flying up and hooking onto the gargoyle there," White details.

"It's quite obvious that the storyline is that the moment they fall away, he grabs hold of the girl and fires the gun up at the tower. But, in visual terms, you've got to explain *each one* of those things. Quite ponderously, you've got to see the gun fire, you've got to see the grappling hook fly through the air, you've got to see it grab hold of something, you've got to see *all* of those. You mustn't take anything for granted."

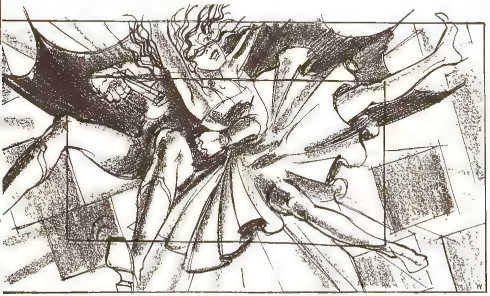
However, the artist remarks, "Sometimes, when the film's editors get it, they say, 'OK, *everybody* knows he has a grappling hook, he has fired a grappling hook, if the wire pulls up tight, we all know what he has done. But as a politeness to him, and for good [film] grammar, as it were, you've got to have all your periods, commas, capital letters, and in those terms, that's all they are."

Storyboarding can also short-cut the process of having to leave film on the cutting room floor. Throwing away a few drawings done by one person is relatively inexpensive. Throwing away film which has been shot requiring a crew of numerous highly-paid professionals and incredible overhead costs is something movie producers would rather avoid if they can.

#26) The ledge gives way & they fall.



#27) Blue screen & doubles. B.G. 'vertical' matte painting. Batman grabs Vicki & reaches into his Batbelt for his gizmo-gun. (Camera pulls back & spirals).



#28) Blue screen & doubles. B.G. 'vertical' matte painting. Track straight into matte painting vanishing point. (Spiral movement on blue sc. camera only).

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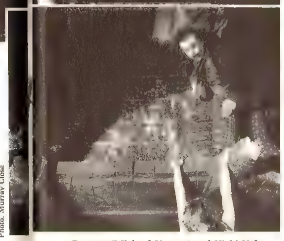


Photo: Murray Close

Batman (Michael Keaton) and Vicki Vale (Kim Basinger) are about to take a fall, thanks to the Joker (Jack Nicholson). The storyboards on these pages preview the result, a climactic sequence, which illustrates how preliminary artwork can convey the excitement of the finished film.

"I could even see," White says, "as I pinned these separate drawings up on the wall that I could shuffle those and change them all around, in the way that an editor would—and quite often we do so. We say, 'We can take out that whole middle piece, if we close that thing up, and put that shot in front of that, we can shorten it, we can make sense,' which is very much a requirement. Sometimes, a scene can run on too long, or it's just too brief and quick.

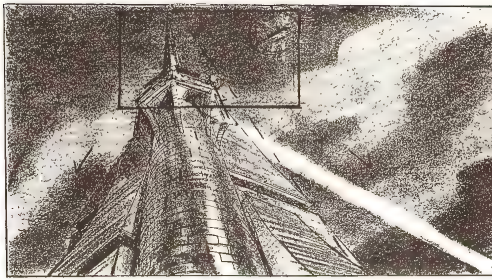
"Each one of those drawings lasts, on average, in screen terms, two or three seconds at the most. So what are we looking at here, 12 seconds? Fifteen seconds? In film time, that's a lot. If you sit and look at your watch when you're watching television, and count the cuts, and glimpse back at your watch, you look at the number of cuts there can be in 15 seconds. It's an *immense* amount of screen time."

A former movie art director, White has a broad understanding of all areas of the filmmaking process. As with most films, drawing up *Batman* has required constant close collaboration with the director, in this case Tim Burton (CS #8, STARLOG #145) "He's the fountainhead," White notes. "That's how it works."

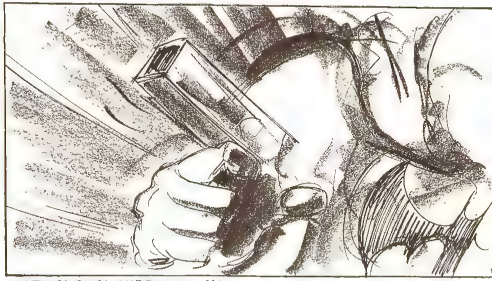
The storyboards are drawn with a pencil, then outlined in black ink. "We all work for the famous photo-printing Xerox machine nowadays," says the artist, "and it has to be reproduced so that every member of the unit concerned gets a copy of the storyboards, and then quite often they're FAXed across the Atlantic out to Los Angeles. So, you have to use those materials. If all else fades—the [pencilled] half-tones—at least they've got the black line.

"Sometimes, they look at your drawing and they say, 'Well, we're not going to do it that way.' But at least when 100 different people who all have 100 different visual images inside their brains look at this, they all say, 'We're not going to do it that way' –they tell you how they *are* going to do it."

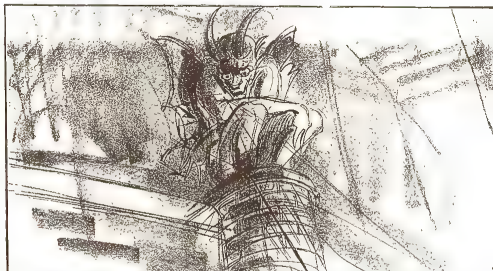
Admits Michael White, "It's a good thing to be wrong in some ways. I can just go away and draw it again. But at least they begin to say, 'Well, that should be a little bit further over there,' 'I didn't imagine that we would have to do that,' and 'Do we need to do that?' And the argument starts and the conversation starts, and you arrive, not necessarily at a compromise, but at a much firmer idea, possibly from the director or from the producer, or sometimes from the special effects man, as to just how to shoot that scene from *Batman*."



#29) Camera 'falls away' from the bell-tower ledge.



#30) Fires his 'bat-thing' (All Batcap & rubble).



#31) The 'hook' finds a spot & holds on the gargoyle. The line tightens.

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Detective Comic*

Abandoning his "Mr. Mom" identity, Michael Keaton considers his new guise as Gotham's grim guardian.

By MARC SHAPIRO

Michael Keaton had a definite response when his good Beetlejuice buddy, director Tim Burton, rang him up and asked him if he would like to play Batman. He doubted Burton's sanity.

"I thought Tim had been working too hard," laughs Keaton, remembering his introduction to all things batty. "I figured he was out of his mind."

The actor is recalling his first brush with *Batman* during an early afternoon conversation in a Hollywood hotel room. It's only 10 days before *Batman* opens, and Keaton is eager to talk, the better to

Killing Joke Art, Brian Bolland/Courtesy Warner Bros.

Keaton did his best, quickly gaining the support of most fans who didn't see him as their image of Batman.

"The coolest thing about Batman to me was that he wasn't your typical superhero. He has no superpowers and basically has to rely on his intelligence to create things that will protect him.

"I was also very impressed that the picture would focus on the human side of this character," he continues. "There was much more going on than a guy who dressed up in a Bat-suit and went out at night seeking vengeance against criminals. You couldn't really start with Batman. You had to start with Bruce Wayne, a man who is dark, angry, depressed and just a little bit psychotic. There was a lot to like about this character from an acting standpoint and so, as tired as I was, I jumped at the offer."

Keaton jumped all right, right into the center of a mega-controversy surrounding his casting as Batman. Hardcore Bat-fans didn't take kindly to the fact that the actor "was not a comic-book fan" and had only seen the often-maligned Adam West TV series "once or twice."

"Let's not forget the comments about me being weak-chinned and a wimp," he chuckles. "You name it, I heard it."

But while he heard it, he concedes he did not necessarily understand it.

"At first, I didn't have any reaction to the hardcore comic fans getting so upset," says the actor. "I just didn't get what the big deal was. I did find the whole thing kind of interesting. But, by the time we started filming in England, the whole thing just got to be real funny. To this day, I still can't believe that anybody would take my being cast as Batman so seriously. I'm sorry, but I just don't get it."

Keaton admits, however, that the controversy did prove to be the spark he needed to do right by the role.

have his first role as superhero on everybody's lips throughout the summer.

Keaton is high on life. He wasn't when Tim Burton made his play.

"I had just finished four films in a row," says Keaton. "I was tired and not really looking to work for a while. All I was looking to do was take a break and read some scripts."

His plans were scuttled, though, when he looked at the *Batman* screenplay. He liked the story, he already knew he could live with Burton as director, and playing opposite Jack Nicholson would appear to have been the icing on the cake. However, it was this vision of Batman that struck his acting fancy.

"The controversy actually stimulated me," he relates. "It was never a matter of 'I'll show you,' but I'm very competitive by nature and enjoy challenges. I was really beat after doing so many pictures back to back, and so, I felt the backlash against my being cast was exactly the jolt I needed. I knew I wasn't going to let all that stuff get to me. Nothing was going to stop me from being the best Batman I could be."

Except maybe himself, for Keaton readily admits that once he put on the cape and cowl, he wasn't the life of the party.

"I'm usually a lot of fun to work with," he says, "but I've got to be totally honest. I was not a lot of fun to work with on this movie. I was exhausted, tired and pretty burned out going into *Batman*, and I was a real pain in the ass during a good part of the filming."

"You had to start with Bruce Wayne, a man who is dark, angry, depressed and just a little bit psychotic," explains Keaton.

Retrofitted Photo: Copyright 1988 The Geffen Company

"I still can't believe that anybody would take my being cast as Batman so seriously," says the *Beetlejuice* actor.

But, it never got the point where it got personal or I told Jack Nicholson or Tim to [screw] off. I would get angry for a while, then I would calm down and we would go ahead and get the next shot."

With so little grounding in Batman lore, Keaton was quite happy to turn over the lion's share of the hero's development to director Burton.

"It wasn't like with *Beetlejuice* where I brought in this idea of how the character should be and Tim latched onto it and ran," says Keaton. "Tim knew more about Batman than I ever will and so I put the character in his hands and went with his vision. Occasionally, we would differ on how a scene should be played but I basically knew what he expected and went with what he wanted."

But knowing all that didn't prevent Keaton from sometimes attempting a liberty or two.

"We were shooting this scene where Batman comes out from behind a girder and decks this guy," chuckles the actor. "and I stopped the shot and told Tim I had this great idea for a kicker to the scene. Tim looked at me for a second and then said OK. I told him that, after I knocked this guy out, I wanted to do a little tap dance. He looked at me like I was stupid or something. It was then that I realized that Tim had this stuff down more than I did and that I was going to *have* to pay attention."

Attention was certainly paid when Jack Nicholson hit the soundstage as the Joker. Keaton and Nicholson did not spend too many days working together, but Keaton remembers them as quality days.

"Working with Nicholson was a definite incentive for me as an actor. With Nicholson, you get much more than his talent. You get his knowledge and his point-of-view about movies. You get an actor who comes to life right in front of your eyes."

"Jack and I are basically the same kind of people, which is why we got along so great. We would sit around between shots and talk about all sorts of things. We would eat dinner together, hit the art museum. It was a great experience."

Keaton had prepared for the physical side of playing Batman with some pre-filming soccer and boxing drills designed to develop and maintain stamina. But the Bat-suit, rather than his own musculature, was uppermost in Keaton's mind while he was pumping up.

"All the time I was training, I had to keep in mind that I had to maintain a certain weight. Too much weight would have made it impossible for me to get into the old Bat-suit. Too little weight and I would be bouncing around inside of it."

Keaton observes that the suit and what he could or couldn't do in it sticks out as *Batman*'s most memorable moments.

"Being in the suit was a really hard job. The damned thing didn't have any plumbing or a toilet built in, so I pretty much had to go to the bathroom before they put me in it and then hold it. Tim was a lot of help. I would walk out on the set and he would say, 'Well, only 16 more hours to go.' During breaks, I would go offstage and take the top part off."

A major consideration during filming revolved around how Keaton, inside the Bat-suit, should move.

"Batman is such a bigger-than-life character that how I moved in the suit to have the most impact on screen was a major issue on the set. First, it was decided that Batman should have a slow, calculated move to him. But, later in the day, we would get to another scene and the fighting would change so we had to sit down and discuss how to change the moves. Now things like that may not seem too important, but when you're attempting an accurate look at a character, everything must fit."

Including Batman's ability to fly through the air.

"Now, I *didn't* fly," Keaton jokingly corrects. "That's the other superhero with the cape. I did quite a bit of the cable stuff. I did as much of the stunts as I could because it kept me from getting bored. But there were certain things that I just couldn't do and it might have ended the picture *much* earlier if I had tried."

Keaton is no stranger to playing the dark, brooding, not-all-there kind of persona he portrays in *Batman*. His character in *Clean and Sober* was definitely on a downhill ride and *Beetlejuice*, at best, gave him a chance to essay a tarnished white hat. Ditto *The Dream Team*.

"I don't know if I so much identify with those kinds of characters," says Keaton, pausing to consider it. "I do know that the old saw about comics [i.e. comedians] being angry and frustrated people is, to a certain extent, true in my case. So, I would have to say that getting the roles I've gotten lately has been kind of therapeutic.

"Batman was a good acting experience for me," he notes. "It wasn't one of those roles where I would come home after a day of shooting and put my fist through a wall. There was so much for me to do emotionally in this movie that I could leave the set at the day's end and be totally relaxed."

Keaton offers that he didn't give much thought to how much he might be identified with the role of the Dark Knight until the film was completed and he went to a LA Lakers basketball game.

"A couple of people in the parking lot started yelling, '*Batman*,' at me. It was the same in the arena. But one guy saw me and yelled, '*Johnny Dangerously*,' so I guess I haven't become completely typecast yet.

"And I don't think I ever will. I've always gone for many different kinds of roles and I've never really stuck with any one type of character long enough to be typecast. So, I don't think there's too much danger of that happening."

Especially when it comes to *Batman*.

Says Keaton, it was director Tim Burton who kept *him* true to the Dark Knight.

All Batman Photos ©Warner Bros. & © Copyright 1989 DC Comics Inc.

"I *haven't* signed for a sequel and I don't know if I will do another one," Keaton reveals. "If the director and the script were good, I would consider it. But I didn't jump in with this one and say, 'Yeah, I'll do three of these suckers.'"

Keaton has no immediate plans other than the rest and relaxation he intended before *Batman* called.

"Oh, I don't know," cracks Michael Keaton. "Maybe I'll just slip on the old Bat-suit and open a couple of shopping centers."

"I haven't become totally typecast yet," notes Michael Keaton.

The actor's own volatile nature gave him an edge in portraying the millionaire with a secret, but he was careful not to take it out on colleagues like Michael Gough.

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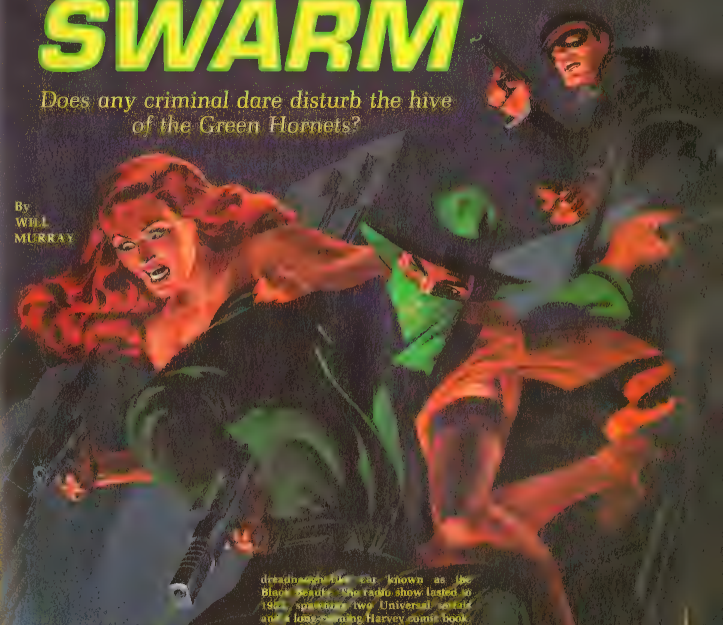
WHERE HORNETS SWARM

Does any criminal dare disturb the hive of the Green Hornets?

By WILL MURRAY



For writer Ron Fortier, reviving the Green Hornet has been a two-year odyssey of wasted publishers, new collaborators and bogged determination that finally bore fruit with this summer's release of *The Green Hornet* #1, from Now Comics. It's the first comic book to feature the legendary crime-buster since Gold Key released a three-issue TV tie-in version back in 1966.

Created by Fran Striker in 1936 for Detroit radio station WXYZ, the Green Hornet, actually newspaper publisher Britt Reid, fought crime in an unnamed American city aided only by his trusty Asian valet, his aide, Kato, and the dreadnought-like car known as the Black Beauty. The radio show lasted to 1952, spawned two Universal serials and a long-running Harvey comic book. After the death of radio drama, the character disappeared into Range until he was revived for the short-lived TV series featuring Van Williams as Reid and the late Bruce Lee as Kato.

Like many members of the over-30 TV generation, Ron Fortier's memories of the Green Hornet were limited to that much-admired show. Two years ago Fortier was scripting *Streetfighter* for Ocean Comics when his editor, Bob Fein, first suggested reviving the Green Hornet.

"At the time, I knew nothing about the character except for what I had seen on the '60s TV program," Fortier #2 recalls, "so my comeback was, 'Hornets

Chapter 5
RADIO'S THRILL SHOW
Now a Screen Sensation!
THE GREEN HORNET STRIKES AGAIN
WARREN HULL as Brit Reid
WADE BOTELER as Michael Axford
KEYE LUKE as Kato
ANNE NAGEL as Miss Case

Photos: Copyright 1967, 1968 Greenway Productions/20th Century Fox TV/Courtesy Will Murray

Fortier was first introduced to the Hornet via the '60s TV series starring Bruce Lee and Van Williams. Those TV elements will be reflected in the second Hornet and Kato.

With the generational approach that writer Ron Fortier has taken, he'll be able to pay homage to such other Hornet adaptations as the serials.

Interesting.' What happened was I met DC artist Steve Erwin, who was touring New England, visiting various comic shops. We met one afternoon and I brought up Palin's desire to bring back the Green Hornet. Steve's face began to light up. As it turned out, he is a big Green Hornet fan. Steve and I literally kicked around ideas for six months that went through two or three different rewrites. By the time we were done, I had over 40 pages of a proposal outlining the character's history, a biography and detailed sketches of a six-issue mini-series bringing into existence a new Green Hornet from the ranks of the old."

Fortier had a publisher and an artist. Unfortunately, Ocean Comics was unable to secure rights to the character. A year passed and Erwin, then working for DC Comics drawing *Checkmate*, suggested approaching Superman's publisher with their proposal.

"I was nervous about the concept," Fortier admits. "I've always been told when you turn in a proposal, make it as few pages as you can. We had done just the opposite. I crafted this humongous thing that looked like a small telephone book. DC was excited about the project but, for whatever reason, didn't want to pursue it. We had heard rumors that there was some legal confusion about the rights. They gave us back our proposal with a great deal of regret."

Almost simultaneously, Fortier met with Now Comics publisher Tony Caputo, for whom he agreed to write *Terminator* at the 1988 San Diego Comics Con.

"During one meeting, Tony himself inaugurated this conversation of old favorite characters that should be in print again," Fortier recalls. "And in his little list, he brought up the Green Hornet! I looked at him, smiled and said, 'Tony, have I got a proposal to show you.' "

Fortier referred Caputo to Leisure Concepts, who currently control rights to the character, but once again, the project nearly foundered. In this case, it was a potential conflict with movie rights that Leisure Concepts had sold to Hanna-Barbera. No one was sure whether those rights included comic-book rights. Caputo persevered, and initiated a three-way discussion that resulted in clearing comic rights to the Green Hornet last November

The great nephew of the Lone Ranger, Britt Reid (along with Kato), will continue to uphold the family tradition of mystery men.

All Green Hornet Comic Art: Jeff Butler/Copyright 1988 Now Comics

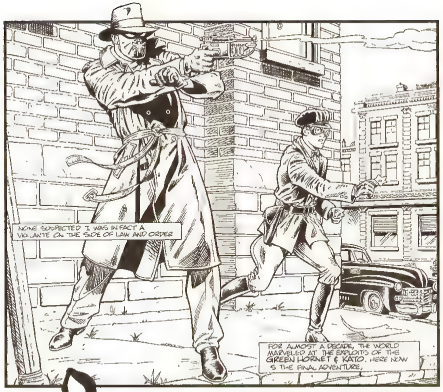
Unfortunately, by this time, Steve Erwin's DC commitments precluded him from working on the book and a new artist, Jeff Butler—also a hardcore Green Hornet fan—was recruited from TSR to take his place. But Erwin's influence will still be felt.

"My original intent was to go with what the TV show had done, and just do a first-time Green Hornet," Fortier recalls. "There would never have been any father, son or whatever. Steve Erwin was very adamant about the generational thing. What really inspired him was that old connection between Britt Reid, the Green Hornet, and his great-uncle, John Reid, the Lone Ranger. Steve very much wanted to see a story that demonstrated to the fans the connection between these two great fictional characters."

However, in the years since both the Green Hornet and the Lone Ranger—both the products of the late Fran Striker's imagination—had been broadcast from WXYZ, the characters had been sold off to separate companies. The Lone Ranger currently belongs to the Weather Corporation, who have steadfastly refused to allow their character to share the same fictitious reality with the Green Hornet. Legally inhibited from involving the Lone Ranger (see page 43) in his storyline, Fortier was forced to simply acknowledge the Masked Rider of the Plains visually.

"The first two pages of book #1 show a painting on a library wall of a cowboy with a black mask on a big white horse," Fortier explains. "But, we are *not* saying he is the Lone Ranger."

Accepting the Green Hornet/Lone Ranger connection meant either doing a period piece or somehow modernizing the Hornet. Fortier solved this dilemma by extending the Reid clan's commitment to justice into the present day. Incorporating his original mini-series concept into what will actually be a monthly color title, Fortier plans what he calls a "generational" approach to the Green Hornet, telling in the first six issues, the story of the Reid family from its earliest pioneers to the contemporary inheritors


NONE SUSPECTED THAT BEHIND THE MASK OF A VILLAINOUS OUTLAW ON THE SIDE OF LAW AND ORDER
FOR ALMOST A DECADE, THE WORLD MARVELED AT THE EXPLOITS OF THE GREEN HORNET & KATO. HERE NOW IS THE FINAL ADVENTURE!

of its proud tradition.

"Before our Green Hornet," he says, "there will have been three previous Green Hornets. Britt Reid is the great-nephew of 'the Lone Ranger.' The Green Hornet of the '60s is *his* nephew, Britt II. The third Green Hornet and the fourth are brothers, Alan and Paul Reid. They are nephews of Britt II. When I was trying to put the generational thing together, I took calendars and I tried to work out dates for how old these characters would be in the thick of their crime-busting careers. And things weren't working out. I couldn't make the puzzle come out in the father to son situation, until, lo and behold, looking back on what we were trying to enhance, the Lone Ranger's nephew concept, I suddenly said, 'There's the key to the family. It's *not* father to son, it's uncle to nephew!'

"My Green Hornet is going to fall right into the original's mold in being a real city/urban character," Fortier continues. "That is something Jeff Butler and I really want to work into the character. It's an almost weird *deja vu* look at this hero. Jeff is very, very sincere in depicting this so that the tradition of the original Green Hornet is artistically visible in our character's look. We're going to have him go against city criminals, sophisticated gangsters who operate beyond the law."

Traditionally, the Green Hornet has dressed like a smooth underworld type in overcoat and hat and a mask that has run the gamut of domino mask to celluloid face shield. Fortier's family of Hornets will follow that style, despite some early

A long line of criminals will pursue the Hornets through the years, but Fortier hopes to develop a Butch Cavendish-like nemesis for his hero.

promotional illustrations showing a different look.

"Steve Erwin designed the third Green Hornet," Fortier explains. "That was the one with the short-waisted black coat, fedora and very stout look. Jeff Butler came onto the scene and said, 'I want to go back to the trenchcoat and I want a different kind of a mask.' I argued for a full face mask. The compromise we came to was I wanted something that looked menacing. Ever since the Hornet's original concept came into being, one element I feel was lost was his disguise as a criminal. It works on the radio programs when he confronts other villains. Your imagination keys into this totally bogus set-up. Crooks believe he *is* a crook. When that was visualized in the early comics, even in the '60s TV show, production designers and early artists couldn't get away from the heroic mold. They still made him look like a good guy.

"Jeff and I discussed this in a long distance conversation and suddenly both of us said, 'We gotta make him look like a villain. That's the attitude we want. Something very cold and menacing and dangerous.' So, now comes the long trenchcoat, the fedora, the gloves, the scarf, and Jeff's final solution to the mask problem—an old serial called *The Masked Marvel*. It's a half mask that covers the nose on up and comes down over the cheeks, but leaves the mouth open. He went with that design for the mask in an almost pseudo-homage to the Phantom of the Opera. And then, as a tribute to the '60s TV show, in the center of the forehead is the old Hornet symbol that Van Williams wore. So, we're tying all the various images together."

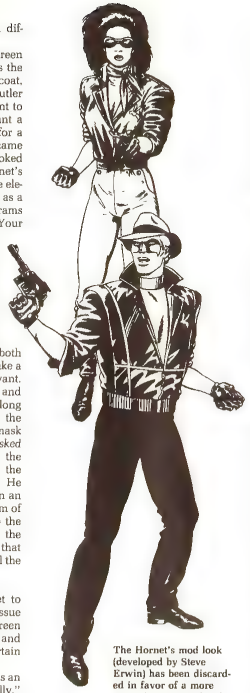
At this writing, Fortier has yet to compose the point in the six-issue storyline where the modern Green Hornet, Paul Reid, assumes the mask and reputation of his forebears so certain details are still not final.

"I look at the '90s coming upon us as an exciting time to experiment fictionally," he predicts. "I would like to stretch the concept, and maybe bring the Green Hornet into the international arena—if I can devise stories that will legitimately involve him and Kato. But, that isn't the book's thrust at the moment."

Previous Green Hornets have always run the family newspaper, *The Daily Sentinel*. Fortier hasn't yet determined Paul Reid's day job, but newspaper publishing isn't in the cards.

"That's something that's still under debate right now," he admits. "What will his occupation be? At the moment, I'm strongly leaning toward something radical. He just may be a concert pianist."

In the new series, Britt Reid's trusty valet and chauffeur, Kato, is also the founder of his own crime-fighting dynasty. Fortier's biggest problem with that was trying to determine Kato's first name.



The Hornet's mod look (developed by Steve Erwin) has been discarded in favor of a more menacing approach. The female Kato will remain.

No source material ever suggested he even had one. So, Fortier was forced to make up his own.

"The original Kato is named Ikano Kato," Fortier says. "The second Kato is Hyashi. Incidentally, that's a tribute to George Hiyashi, who played him in one of the serials. Hiyashi is the Bruce Lee character. Ikano had three sons and Hiyashi is the oldest. Several years later, Ikano's first wife, a Japanese lady, passed away and he met a French woman named Marie Granier, married her, and they have a daughter. Her name is Mishi Kato, and she will become our Kato."

In a nod to Bruce Lee, Hiyashi Kato will remain with the series.

"He is very much alive as a mentor to Mishi, his younger sister," Fortier explains. "The way our story relates is that in 1979, Britt II suffered a major heart attack and retired from being the Green Hornet, so Hiyashi ended up in Hollywood and became a ninja movie star. Our Kato will be the Green Hornet's greatest weapon. She is a graduate of MIT and an electronics and car freak. She designs the new Black Beauty. She plays the chauffeur role, but only out of deep respect for her father. She sees the role of Kato as part of family obligation and honor."

In a striking twist, the latest Kato is not merely the junior partner of the new team.

"She is several years older than the Green Hornet," Fortier adds. "By the time Paul Reid becomes the Green Hornet, he has some mental problems that need ironing out and she becomes his stabilizing influence. The concept of the Green Hornet that is taken from the Lone Ranger—that moral code of never killing—is something Paul finds very difficult to work under. At one point in the early part of the story, he just assumes it doesn't exist. He's going to go out and seek vengeance. It is Mishi who holds that dark part of his character in check."

Although he steeped himself in the lore of every incarnation of the Green Hornet, Fortier doesn't feel bound to the letter of the legend. For example, the character of Mike Axford, the irascible crime reporter on Britt Reid's *Daily Sentinel*, has undergone changes.

"He's totally revamped," Fortier says. "The character present in the original radio series has been changed to a reporter named Mike Sullivan. When the second major storyline begins, we introduce the Hornet's helicopter, Black Stinger, flown by an ex-Army helicopter pilot named Jerry Axford. He will have a major supporting role."

Likewise, Britt Reid's secretary and potential love interest, Lenore "Casey" Case is retroactively excised from the radio version of the Hornet history. Instead, she becomes the wife of Britt II, whom Fortier considers to be identical to the 1960s TV Hornet.

In past incarnations, the Green Hornet has always had a police contact. On radio, it was dour Commissioner Higgins. On TV, it was D.A. Frank Scanlon. Fortier has created a new character to fill that all-important role, one who will maintain the family saga theme that runs through the book. She is police commissioner Diana Reid.

"Diana is the daughter of the original Green Hornet and Paul's older cousin," Fortier explains. "Theirs is more like an aunt-to-nephew relationship. She has past sins that she had to make up to her family. There is a betrayal that leads to a death. She is a part of that betrayal and her connections with Paul are underlined by a strong sense of guilt and atonement. At one point, she wants to resign from be-

(continued on page 50)

Then, You Are... LONE RANGER™

BY DAN SCAPPEROTTI

The man behind the mask, Clayton Moore, briefly recalls those adventurous days of yesteryear.

Few symbols have had the endurance displayed by a certain masked man on a great white horse who first rode into Depression-era living rooms in 1933. The Lone Ranger, who battled the forces of evil in the Old West, has become an enduring symbol of justice and law and order. In the 1980s, anti-crime posters featuring his picture looked down from billboards and subway signs throughout New York City. Clayton Moore not only portrayed the Lone Ranger (who he calls "a great

(© Lone Ranger TV Series 1951, 1952, Renewal Term 1979, 1980, Used by Permission. All Rights Reserved. 1987 The Wrather Corp.

American") when he came to television, but the character became Moore's life.

His legendary lawman was created by producer George W. Trendle and writer Fran Striker for WXYZ, a Detroit-based radio station. The show became a national hit and, along with *The Green Hornet* and *The Shadow*, the very embodiment of dramatic radio. Even today, the program's icons—the silver bullet, the Ranger's horse Silver, the stirring strain of the "William Tell Overture" and the famous departing cry, "Hi-Yo Silver Away!"—are universally recognized.

The show's popularity prompted Herbert J. Yates, president of Republic Pictures, to buy the film rights and produce two serials, *The Lone Ranger* (1938) with Lee Powell as the masked man and *The Lone Ranger Rides Again* (1939) starring Robert Livingston.

September 1938 saw the premiere of the King Features syndicated *Lone Ranger* comic strip which ran both daily and Sundays. Ed Kressy illustrated the strip for less than a year before Charles Flanders took over and continued to draw the masked man's adventures until the strip's end in 1971.

Fran Striker, who had penned several Lone Ranger novels as well as all the radio scripts, wrote the early comic strips but deadline pressures forced him to turn over the strip's writing chores to Bob Green, who was followed by Paul Newman and other writers.

While reprints of the Lone Ranger strip appeared in comic books from time to time, it wasn't until 1947 that the character landed his own title. The first issues again depended on reprints of earlier strips but with issue #38, original material began appearing. Although most of the stories were routine Western adventures about rustlers and bank robbers, some tales rearranged familiar themes. In "The Loaded Burros," the masked man and Tonto uncover a gun-running operation along the Mexican border and a bandit gang bent on reclaiming Texas territory. In "Disaster Bridge," the Lone Ranger must battle both an outlaw gang and an Indian uprising while trying to warn a troop train racing toward a bridge about to be blown up.

"Those comics were very enjoyable," says Clayton Moore, who owns several Lone Ranger collectibles himself. "Although I didn't read every one cover to cover, I was on the cover of some of them. We did special [color photo] shooting sessions for those."

The Lone Ranger was riding high throughout the '40s, but was missing from theater screens. However, the end of the decade saw a burgeoning new broadcast medium invade American homes: television. Ever the astute businessman, Trendle foresaw the power of TV.

Trendle proposed a new TV series based on his most famous character and General Mills agreed to sponsor it. The producer maintained full control over the series, and his first job was to find the actor who would embody the character of the Lone Ranger. Enter Clayton Moore.

"In 1949, I was awarded the role of the Lone Ranger," recalls Moore. "I was personally picked by the producer of the radio show, George W. Trendle, and Fran Striker, the writer of the radio shows and all the magazine stories. The radio shows were excellent and we tried our best to make the TV shows comparable."

Moore had been under contract with Republic Pictures since 1941 when he had a featured role in *Tuxedo Junction*. The actor had an odd screen career during that time, alternating between heroic and villainous roles. In 1942, he portrayed Dr. Larry Grayson in the rousing 15-chapter serial *Perils of Nyoka* with Kay Aldridge as the heroine Nyoka. The pair, along with a group of scientists, battle the evil Vultura in their quest to find the lost tablets of Hippocrates and a buried treasure.

Strangely, although Moore was an accomplished rider and athlete, he was extensively doubled in the serial by Dave Sharpe. Moore has a great respect for the stuntmen. "If you're sincere, the stunt people are very helpful to actors."

He returned to the serial scene in 1946 as Louis Ashe, the chief henchman of *The Crimson Ghost*, a master criminal bent on world domination. Moore stepped back into heroism the following year as the famous outlaw in *Jesse James Rides Again*, script writers having managed to reform the notorious outlaw. The serial proved popular enough to revive Jesse in 1948's *Adventures of Frank and Jesse James*. Moore gave up his long dark coat for chaps and broad hat in *Adventures* so the studio could match stock shots from their earlier serial, *The Adventures of Red Ryder*. His second serial in 1948 was as a federal agent in *G-Men Never Forget*.

Just before he won his landmark role, Moore was behind another mask. As the *Ghost of Zorro*, he played the character that first influenced the Lone Ranger's creation.

Although serial production had fallen on hard times in the '50s. Moore was back in 1952 as Graber, the Earthling henchman of Retik, the ruler of the Moon who matched wits with the rocket-suited Commando Cody in *Radar Men from the Moon*. Moore didn't stay on the wrong side of the law for long and returned to fighting evildoers in 1953's *Jungle Drums of Africa*. He also made two Columbia serials, *Son of Geronimo* (1952) and *Gunfighters of the Northwest* (1954).

Between serials, Moore appeared in B-westerns opposite such sagebrush stars as Duncan Renaldo (*The Gay Amigo*), Roy Rogers (*Helldorado*), Allan "Rocky" Lane (*Frontier Investigator, Captive of Billy the Kid*), and Gene Autry (*Sons of New Mexico*). In *The Cowboys and the Indians*, the villainous Moore is not only up against Autry, but his own saddle pal, Jay Silverheels. Moore was featured in several adventures of another masked Western hero, Columbia Pictures' long-running Durango Kid series starring Charles Starrett. He was frequently on the receiving end of Durango's punches in films such as *South of Death Valley, Bandits of El Dorado, Cyclone Fury* and *The Hawk of Wild River*.

Interestingly, the costume for television's Lone Ranger was influenced more by the comic strip than the character's filmed adventures. The producers avoided the full face mask used by Republic in their serials as well as Zorro's *Fighting Legion*, opting instead for the smaller mask just across the eyes originally depicted by Ed Kressy for the strip.

"We worked five or six weeks on the serials and about a week to 10 days on the features at Republic," Moore remembers. "We were on the set ready to go at eight o'clock in the morning and worked until 7 or 8 at night. We worked pretty hard."

All of which must have seemed extravagant when filming of the TV program began. "We did a show every *two* days. We would shoot 15 shows, and while we were shooting those, the writers would be writing other shows. We didn't shoot in continuity. We would be shooting two or three shows at the same time."

The production schedule varied between studio and location lensing. One

Location shooting for three TV episodes was usually done all at once.

"I see him as a good American and that should cover plenty," says Moore

In an ironic twist, Moore also donned the mask of the hero who inspired the Lone Ranger, the *Ghost of Zorro*.

As Louis Ashe, Moore served another masked man, *The Crimson Ghost*.

As a serial hero, Moore battled menaces to the beat of the *Jungle Drums of Africa*.

Crimson Ghost Photo: Copyright 1946 Republic Pictures

Ghost of Zorro Photo: Copyright 1949 Republic Pictures

Jungle Drums of Africa Photo: Copyright 1953 Republic Pictures

Lone Ranger & Tonto Characters: Copyright 1989 The Wrather Corp.

week would be spent on location shooting the exteriors for three shows and interiors would be filmed the next week at the studio.

"We filmed the stock shots in the Los Angeles area, out in the desert and at Big Bear. Then, to save money, we went into the studio where we had a big green set, just like outdoors, which we built in the studio. These sets were *tremendous*. We began shooting at the Hal Roach Studio and eventually wound up at the General Service Studios in Hollywood."

Radio's nature dictated that the show's hero must have someone with whom he could discuss the exposition. The Lone Ranger couldn't go riding around the prairie talking to himself, and so, the character of "his faithful Indian companion, Tonto," was created. Indian actor Jay Silverheels was picked to star in the TV series following the performer who essayed the role in the two serials, Chief Thundercloud.

"It was *wonderful* working with Jay Silverheels," comments Moore with genuine affection. "He was a very nice man to work with. A gentleman. Jay was a full-blooded Mohawk Indian. Off screen, we were very good friends."

The Lone Ranger frequently disguised himself as a bearded old man in order to move among the crooks or townspeople undetected—sourdough prospector, an aging Civil War veteran, or just an old galoot passing through town. Moore's portrayals of these roles are obviously enthusiastic. "When the writers put in the old man, I just did it, but I really enjoyed doing character roles," he says.

Lone Ranger (Color) Movie Photos: Copyright 1956 Warner Bros.

With the success of the TV series, the Masked Rider saddled up on the silver screen once again after a long absence.

The success of the television program prompted Jack Wrather, the property's owner, to license the character for two full-color feature films, *The Lone Ranger* (1956) and *The Lone Ranger and the Lost City of Gold* (1958).

"It took us five to six weeks to film the features. *The Lone Ranger* was filmed in Kenab, Utah and the other film was made in Tucson, Arizona."

It has been 40 years since Clayton Moore first donned the mask and the pair of single action Colt .45s of the Lone Ranger and, at age 75, he doesn't show signs of letting up. Recently, Rhino Video released a trio of videotapes featuring two episodes each of the original shows. Moore briefly introduces each program and explains a bit of Lone Ranger trivia.

While some actors rebelled against being typecast in famous parts, Clayton Moore relished his stint as the Masked Rider of the Plains. His explanation of his affinity for the character is simple. "I see him as a good American and that should cover plenty. He embodied the American traits of honesty, fair play, 'Honor thy father and thy mother,' and being a good citizen. He was so very American that he was easy to portray."

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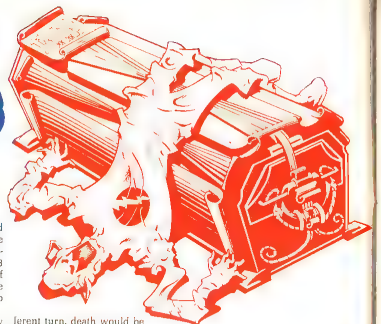


In real life, heroes die all the time. But in comic books, they seldom did—at least not until recently.

Sure, in comics past, heroes, villains and supporting characters often "died" or seemed to die. But, things were seldom permanent. A bit of cloning, a dash of medicine or magic, a dollop of creative continuity rewriting—and everyone was good as new.

Not anymore. Reality's the thing—and "permanent" death is now king. Characters don't get up and walk away from the apocalypse. And, as the comics professionals gathered here explain, there are many reasons for that.

Marv Wolfman

Countless heroes and villains perished at Marv Wolfman's hands during the Crisis he and George Perez brought to the formerly infinite Earths. But that doesn't mean the writer is prepared to accept responsibility for all the four-color homicides that have been committed since.

"The death of Phoenix did that," Wolfman insists. "If you look at the sales of *X-Men*, those issues specifically are the ones that zoomed *X-Men* up. It was the first time that was ever done. It was controversial. That's the one that OK'd wholesale slaughter. *Crisis* didn't do it one way or the other."

Yet even if *Crisis* had no effect on the seemingly growing tide of mystery men murders, it did have one on its author.

"Having done it in such a full scale way in *Crisis*, I realized only afterwards where you can use death for good effect and where you can use it for bad," he notes. "At least in my mind, the death of Supergirl worked because we really [made an effort] to make *the story* work. I thought the death of the Flash worked in the story; I don't necessarily know if it was a good idea to do it. The story was fine, but that doesn't justify whether or not Barry Allen should have died. I'm not sure about him; I'm convinced about Supergirl.

"I wish there had been fewer deaths and the deaths we had done had more importance. The Losers did not bother me because they were realistic characters who were killed off in war. That's OK. Some of the others who died probably *shouldn't* have. We should have had fewer deaths because the effects were still being felt by killing off the characters from Earth-3 in the first issue, killing off Supergirl, killing off Flash and one or two others. We *didn't need* to kill off a lot in other ways.

"Today, though, many characters are sometimes killed off between panels where you don't even have a feeling of missing the character, and very often, the deaths are not used to make the change in the book itself. If tomorrow we were to kill off Starfire, which we're *not* going to do, and a year from now, *The New Titans* was still essentially the same book, there's no logical reason to have done it outside of maintaining some momentary interest for two issues. If, on the other hand, we had decided to kill Starfire and the entire book was radically altered and half the characters quit because they can't put up with this sort of thing and new characters came in and the book took a different turn, death would be justified there

"It depends on where you use death and for what reason." Confesses Marv Wolfman. "I don't think just getting rid of a character for momentary sales is as good an idea as we have all been guilty of doing."

Daniel Dickholtz & David McDonnell

Crisis Art: George Perez/Characters Trademark & Copyright 1985 DC Comics, Inc.

Walt & Louise Simonson

There are good ways and bad ways to kill major characters. As soon as your sales start to slide, kill somebody off!" laughs Walt Simonson, who's about to take over the art and writing reins on *Fantastic Four*. "I can see the reactions now: 'Oh, that Simonson! What a *horrible* guy!'

"It isn't really so cut-and-dried. It is certainly true that the audience that buys comics responds well to death—saleswise, anyway."

But, Walt's wife, writer Louise Simonson, interjects, "You can do it badly and the sales go up anyway."

"As far as major characters go, I read a lot of the stuff about how DC decided to kill Robin," Walt Simonson continues. "In a way, I'm not that concerned about how they arrived at the decision to knock somebody off—DC has done very well publicity-wise with the phone-in 'Should Robin die?' vote—but it really depends on how you tell the story. It certainly isn't a storyline you can use very often, and in some cases, you know damn well the guy's not going to be dead forever. Either they'll do flashback stories, or introduce another character with the same name, because they have to protect the trademark. It's like anything else; the death of a character is a dramatic tool and it can punch home a dramatic story.

"[In *Thor*], I bumped off the Executioner, a major supporting character. I thought that worked well. It shed new light on the character, even redeemed him somewhat. It wasn't just bumping him off for the fun of it. You want to create a situation with drama, and there are very few situations in life more dramatic than death. It's one of a storyteller's most powerful tools."

"When you structure a story, you have to ask, 'What's at stake? What's important?'" Louise Simonson notes. "And if it's somebody's life that's at stake, it makes the story more important."

—Patrick Daniel O'Neill

Flash Art: Clarence Inflestine/Rodin Rodrigues/Copyright 1985 DC Comics, Inc.

Archie Goodwin

I feel deaths are a part of the melodrama, but I don't think we should be too gratuitous with it," comments Archie Goodwin, DC editor and current writer of *Wolverine* [CS #8].

"Also, I think every writer [coming onto a new series] wants to have their chance to kill off a major supporting character. It's a new situation for them, so it's often very tempting and it's an easy thing to fall into. I've done it, sometimes better and sometimes worse. It's totally *justifiable*, but not always *justified*, if you know what I mean. You have to make it justifiable," Goodwin says.

"Early in my writing career, I wrote *Iron Man* and there was a female character I had created [Janice Cord]. I couldn't get the relationship [with Tony Stark] going anywhere. It wasn't interesting to me, and if it isn't interesting to me, it sure isn't interesting to the readers, so I killed off the character. I feel that was an unjustifiable killing; I was letting myself off the hook. It was a bad use of death in comics and a bit gratuitous.

"Death happens in real life, too, but the problem in comics is that too often it's *only* violent death," Goodwin complains, "and like I did in *Iron Man*, it's because the writer couldn't think of what to do with the characters, so it seems pretty dramatic. I think that's wrong."

As for those characters who return from the grave, Goodwin says comics are like soap operas and that's part of what makes them fun.

"For every person who reads comics for 25 years and says, 'Aw, they're doing this again,' there's someone who may have read comics for only two years. Why should that reader be denied the pleasure of wondering, 'Is he dead? Will he come back?' You have to strike sort of a balance. They're all useable elements; it's just *how* you use them."

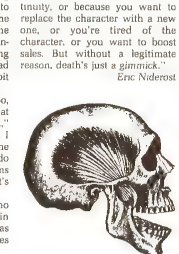
Drew Bittner

Mark Verheiden

The real point," writer Mark Verheiden declares, "is not who's getting killed off, but whether it was *done well*. Was it done in a well-told story? That's the main question. A case would on made that some of these stories weren't well done. I have no problem with killing anybody off, as long as there's a valid reason for it. If you want to kill off a long-established, major character, I say, 'Go for it.' But there has to be a *legitimate, dramatic* reason for it.

"I have no feelings for these characters out of the fictional realm, and I certainly don't feel they're real. Some people can foster feelings in their own mind to the extent that they feel these comic characters are as real as any living person. But there can be many wrong reasons for getting rid of a character—because of continuity, or because you want to replace the character with a new one, or you're tired of the character, or you want to boost sales. But without a legitimate reason, death's just a *gimmick*."

Eric Niderost



Timothy Truman

I'm not that attached to *any* comics characters. Killing them doesn't affect me much, and I've never given it much thought," admits *Scout: War Shaman*'s writer/artist Timothy Truman, "although the comic companies get a lot of good PR out of it.

"I'm not real fannish in that I really *don't care* who dies in comics," he laughs, although the death of the Jason Todd Robin, and certain other comic deaths, upset him somewhat.

"In some cases, it really bothers me that kids get a hold of the stuff, particularly from the companies that have many action figures and beach towels and play sets connected with their characters. There's still something in the back of my head that says these newsprint comics should be. . . Well, I had 'em when I was a kid, and I wish I could give a couple to my kids to enjoy, but I really have to screen them these days. That bothers me. We can't trust Superman or Batman to be something we can just automatically lay down in front of a six-year-old today. That's sad."

—Kim Howard Johnson

Art: By & Copyright 1985 Wendy Pini

Wendy Pini

Death is kind of a hot issue right now because most companies know that 'Death Sells.' You kill a character in a book and you're guaranteed much higher sales for that book," notes Wendy Pini, the writer/artist behind *Elfquest* and the *Beauty & the Beast* graphic novel *Portrait of Love* [CS #8]. "This is kind of unfortunate, but I do feel that everything has its place in storytelling. And if you kill off a character for a specific reason in your story, then you should commit to that action and not even *consider* the possibility of bringing that character back or reviving him. Then, you demean the meaning of the character's death, the significance of it—particularly if it's a hero."

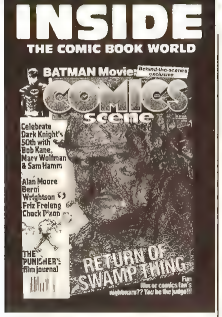
Pini was especially "offended by the concept of having a 900-phone number-vote on whether Robin should be killed off or not. By the public's votes, the character was killed off. You *have* to have a good reason for telling a story because storytelling is one of the most precious things we have left in society. Kids in particular get so much out of a well-crafted story and there's so *little* of it on television. Kids aren't reading books now like they used to, so they're reading comic books. As such, it's really important for the storytellers who create comics to *always* have a strong and logical motive for why they do these things. When they do it, they should stick to it.

"If you want to put death into the book to sell more copies—looking at it from a crass commercial aspect—then I suppose you should create a sacrificial lamb, create a character to kill, one who won't really be missed. But if you decide to kill a major character, then by all means commit to it and make it mean something so that the reader gets something out of it.

"Kids can deal with it," she insists, "and ultimately they thank you for respecting them, for not talking down to them. No matter how much they protest and say, 'Oh please bring this character back. Revive him somehow!' somewhere deep inside, they're going to feel cheated if you do."

—Scott Lobdell

Scout Art: By & Copyright 1988 Timothy Truman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Hornet

(continued from page 42)

ing police commissioner, feeling she has let her family—and the Green Hornet tradition—down. Her immediate cousin, Britt II, convinces her that if she is to make any kind of reparation to the family it is by remaining police commissioner and feeding the new Green Hornet, being his inside track."

One Reid family tradition will be sustained, however. Where the Lone Ranger used silver bullets to wound, never to kill, and the various Green Hornets employed non-lethal gas guns, the latest member of the clan is modernizing the prohibition.

"I'm envisioning a special kind of electric gun," Fortier says, "a new Taser-type of weapon, may be developed by the police for mob control. It will be a hand gun that fires an electrical charge that can hit a person at 25-30 yards away and literally shock them. For once, the Green Hornet is going to have an honest-to-goodness sting!"

Beyond the sixth issue—or the seventh if the story of the Reid clan spills over an additional issue as Fortier suspects it may—Fortier plans a mixture of single issue and continued stories for the modern Green Hornet. His enthusiasm for the project bubbles up in his voice and spills over into his feelings for his collaborator Jeff Butler.

"Of every comic I have done to date, this is the one I'm most thrilled with," Fortier says. "No artist I have ever worked with has been this accomplished. The pencils are fantastic. I was blown away. Jeff is a people artist. He sketches people who look so believably real, you think you're looking at photographs instead of comic art. That lends itself to strong characterization in plot. So much of what I hope to be writing will, aside from the action and adventure, be getting into these people's psyches."

And if the new Green Hornet comic book isn't exciting enough, there's talk that Hanna-Barbera, previously planning a spoof version of the Green Hornet in the *Pink Panther* vein, has become interested in Fortier's version of the character.

"My agent, Mike Freidrich, was made aware by Tony Caputo that Hanna-Barbera was in touch with Leisure Concepts about what we're doing," Ron Fortier reveals. "They got very excited about some of the ideas in the proposal, especially Mishi Kato. The people at Hanna-Barbera said, 'How about FAXing us a copy of the proposal?' Apparently, there's a strong possibility that they'll be in touch with us."

Whatever ultimately happens with the Green Hornet film, one thing is certain: The Green Hornet is back with a vengeance.

Every one of him.

Turtles

(continued from page 19)

there and dealing with the script."

What Laird and Eastman are dealing with is the major merchandising market unleashed by the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. From action figures to stuffed toys to Turtle lunch bags to Turtle-wear, it's all out there with more on the way. Picture, if you will, puzzles, party favors, a Turtle Van to carry the action figures, a Footmobile that looks like "a big flying Cadillac thing," Sewer Tubes for the action figures to float in, T-shirts, talking Turtle toothbrush stands and electric Turtle toothbrushes—even fluffy Turtle slippers!

"One of the things about it—and this is something people don't realize—is that Kevin and I really love toys. Everyone in this studio has a real affinity for toys and games. To see these little guys in three-and-a-half-inch, articulated action figure form is a real trip for us, a distinct pleasure.

"When we first met with Playmates, the toy company, one of their initial concerns was that all the Turtles look alike. And that's true; the only way to tell them apart is through context or by seeing their weapon. When we were at this meeting, we suggested, 'Well, why not initials on their belts?' Then, I can't remember if we suggested the different color headbands or they did, and that was something we could live with. It wasn't a structural change, it was a cosmetic color change and I think it has worked fairly well.

"One of the things about the toy business, which is different than comics, is you must have a toy that's immediately identifiable to a kid as being different from the toy next to it. That's why you see such variation in the weird characters in these different toy lines. With the Turtles, it was difficult because they do look alike. They have the same body shape, pretty much the same expression. But we didn't want them to change—to make one fat, make one skinny, make one tall—so that was a pretty good compromise and it doesn't seem to have hurt them at all. Kids love them. They're still flying off the shelves."

There are *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* toys, cartoons and a movie. Did Peter Laird ever expect this would happen?

"Never in a million years. No. Never, never, never. And every time we think we've seen it all, something weirder happens. This movie is something. If we had been asked five years ago to pick the most unlikely thing that would happen, it would have been to think that Jim Henson's studio would be designing outfits for the Turtles. Right now, if the movie never got made, it would almost be worth it just to see what they've done up to this point. I mean, I want the movie to be made, don't get me wrong, but it has been such an amazing trip thus far."

ANIMATORS UNDER GLASS

While the Disney professionals toil under the watchful gaze of their admirers, a new group of artists struggle under greater scrutiny.

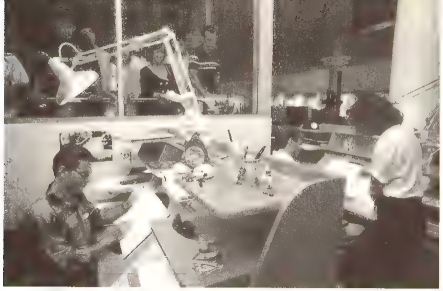
By DAVID HUTCHISON

Working at their desks in full view of visitors at the new Animation Building at the Disney/MGM Studios in Florida, animators are seen creating the drawings that outline Mickey's every move for a new series of classic stories. For some of them, this is their first professional job.

"This facility was originally staffed with the idea that we would be doing 24-minute featurettes very much like Mickey's *Christmas Carol*," reveals Paul Curasi, who functions as the studio's Manager of Training. "Things have evolved since then, so that our first film is a new Maroon Cartoon short, 'Roller-coaster Rabbit,' which will eventually be released theatrically with a live-action film. I expect the animation will be finished in the fall, post-production completed by Christmas and be ready for release sometime after the first of the year."

The new Animation Building is staffed with a 71-member animation team that includes eight animators, a host of assistants and editorial, photo, painting and effects experts working in three units, seven days a week. Most of the Florida animation staff has come from the Disney Studio in California. In addition, the company has begun an internship program in Florida similar to the one it has used in California for more than a decade to develop new animation talent for the Disney Studios.

Two graduates of the Ringling School



At Disney-MGM Studios, the animators are under glass for all the world to see.

of Art in Sarasota, recently trained under the California program, became the first participants of the Disney internship program to work at the Disney-MGM Studios starting as entry-level animators' assistants. Nine interns from five major U.S. art schools became the first interns to train at Walt Disney Animation Florida this past spring.

Paul Curasi hopes to have a new group of 10-15 juniors and seniors chosen from schools throughout the country participate in each semester's internship. Supervisors evaluate each intern's work, and those whose talents meet the needs of the animation department are offered jobs at the Disney-MGM Studios following graduation.

"Our internship program is very similar to the way Walt worked in the early years of his studio when he searched out top artistic talent and put them into a full-scale production situation," Curasi explains. "Walt relied heavily on in-shop training in which more experienced animators discussed their personal approach to animation. You can't print instruction manuals on animation; you must talk it through and do it.

"We examined the curriculum of all the major art schools in the United States. We wanted to identify those schools that had a very strong, disciplined art program with an emphasis on drawing. We've been working with a select group of schools for about two years. We visit them three times a year and look through the portfolios of what they consider to be their top talent. We select some of those people and bring them down to the studio here to work in our semester-long intern program for art studio credit.

"It has been a phenomenal success. I would say about one-third of our staff here is the result of this program. The big advantage for us is that not only do we get top talent, but we get a lot of enthusiasm and fresh ideas."

The interns are taken through three phases of training, Curasi reveals. "First, the basic principles of animation: timing, squash, stretch, secondary action, staging, exaggeration, etc.—basically how to draw for animation. Even though the drawings are two-dimensional, the characters must appear to be *three*-dimensional. We emphasize life study drawing and action analysis.

"The second phase shows how to apply those principles in a production situation. For example, someone may be able to draw extremely well as an artist but they may not be able to draw repeatably, they may not have a consistent line quality or their aesthetic sense may not be one that applies to animation. Animation is visual communication, pantomime. You must be able to come up with gags and a visual means of communicating something. This is the part of the program in which we find out if they *really* have what it takes to be an animator.

"Finally, in the third part of the program, we put them in a production situation to see how they work. We emphasize teamwork, quality of work, thoroughness, discipline and creativity; not necessarily in that order."

Remarks the Manager of Training, "The creative process that is basic to the way we create a film isn't an individual process, it is a collective process. The values that you have to draw on for any film, no matter how long or short it is, exceed even the most talented individual you may have. You have to draw out the best from everyone and you have to have them working closely together. Every drawing in an animated film *has* to count. There is no such thing as a filler drawing. There is so such thing as a filler idea, or even a line of dialogue. Everything must advance and support the story. And it's very hard for any one person to do all that.

"It's like a relay race," affirms Paul Curasi. "Some people are great starters, or great runners or great finishers. You have to match the quality of each individual and how they work on a daily basis. Each person's role is not to merely continue the work of what someone has done previously, but to add to it."

In the ink & paint department, cels are painstakingly colored. And now, visitors can watch the process.

Disney on Display

For the first time, the public can actually watch Disney artists as they work on animated shorts and featurettes. As part of the new Disney-MGM Studios Theme Park in Florida's Walt Disney World, guests can peer through the glass walls that surround the animation studio and witness first-hand the intricate process of giving an animated character the illusion of life.

"Animation has always been the heart and soul of the Disney Company," states Roy E. Disney, vice-chairman of Disney's Board of Directors and the company's head of animation. "Animation is one of those things that most people find very mysterious. I suspect guests will be entranced by the animation process as they watch over the artists' shoulders."

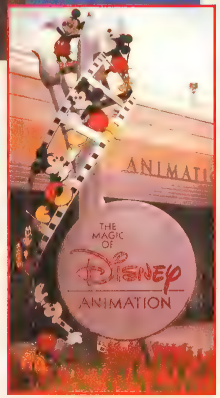
Disney doesn't exaggerate, either. That is *exactly* what a visitor can do. Only a thin glass wall separates guests from the artists. One can stand about a foot or so away from an animator and watch him at work all day—until, of course, the animator leaves or the building closes.

The tour begins in a small but elegant animation gallery which displays production artwork from the Disney archives. On opening day, there were Bill Tytla's key animation drawings of the Prince of Darkness from *Fantasia* stretched along one wall with maquettes and other inspirational art. The gallery contains three rooms, and showcases the artistic stages of animation, from concept to art to finished cel set-ups. Backgrounds from *Pinocchio*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Peter Pan* and others are engagingly presented for close-up inspection along with art and cels from more recent films such as *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, *The Rescuers* and *The Great Mouse Detective*. In a tall case in the center of the room are 13 of the 32 Academy Awards presented to Walt Disney, an industry record. The gallery also serves as a waiting area for guests to begin the self-guided tour of the Animation Building.

From the animation collection, guests move onto the Disney Animation Theater, where they watch an eight-minute film starring Robin Williams and Walter Cronkite, who explain how an animated film is created. In a fast-paced and very funny mix of live action and animation, Robin Williams is transformed into one of Peter Pan's lost boys and taken on a journey through the animation process. Williams is changed into a Toon character by Tinker Bell. As the famous fairy flies around him, Williams ad libs, "Oooh! She's so bright. It's like being in the presence of Barbra Streisand." Cronkite imprisons the Toon Williams under the glass plate of an animation camera and the journey begins.

The doors open, allowing guests to wander at leisure through a long glass corridor that winds through every department in the building. In addition to watching animators at their desks, visitors get a "fish bowl" view of the storyboard room, effects animators, clean-up, Xerox, ink and paint, layout and backgrounds, camera and post-production. There are three units at work, seven days a week. The Disney Studios recently negotiated a contract with the cartoonists' union allowing them to assign people to work any consecutive five days out of seven, so visitors can watch the artists work on weekends as well.

Walter Cronkite and a very animated Robin Williams explain the creation of a cartoon. And that's the way it is.



Visitors discover the magic of animation at the Disney-MGM animation facility.

All Photos Copyright 1989 The Walt Disney Company

At the tour's end, guests gather in a small video room, to hear and see interesting personal comments from Disney animators about their work displayed on several monitors. The tour climaxes in another theater with a selection of great scenes from classic Disney animated films.

The animation team at the new Florida facility is led by Britisher Max Howard, animation administrator for *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, and Burny Mattinson, whose credits include *Mickey's Christmas Carol* and *The Great Mouse Detective*.

At first, there was some trepidation about the "fish bowl" working conditions, and Disney CEO Michael Eisner suggested relying on new people, fresh out of school, who hadn't yet formed any real working habits. Older, more experienced animators were moved more to the center of the room, away from the glass walls, so that they wouldn't feel inhibited by being on display. Almost at once, there were protests. The older animators didn't like being so far away from the glass corridor. "People can't see what we're doing," they complained. Even the shift in the work week has been well received. Those working over weekends appreciate having a couple of weekdays off to do shopping and errands on traditional business days.

It should be emphasized that communication with the working artists through the glass wall is frowned upon. Tapping on the glass to attract attention isn't a good idea, and the taking of pictures (with or without flash) is forbidden. Still, there are ways to make your desires known. One local visitor parked herself next to a working animator long enough for him to notice her. Eventually, they met and started dating. So, it should be noted that even though the artists have to be on their best behavior, the same holds true for the guests.

—*David Hutchison*

WALT DISNEY PICTURES AND Steven Spielberg PRESENT

AN ALL NEW

ROGER RABBIT'S BABY HERMAN

CARTOON CARTOON

By IAN SPELLING

As Roger Rabbit, Charles Fleischer gets "TUMMY TROUBLE"

Three hundred and fifty million dollars, a handful of Oscars, and a year later, America's favorite hare, Roger Rabbit, has hopped back into the spotlight as the star of the animated short "Tummy Trouble," which also features that troublesome tot, Baby Herman.

The seven-minute long "Tummy Trouble" heralds a comeback of sorts for shorts, as it marks the first time since "Goofy's Freeway Trouble" in 1965 that Disney has offered a mini-movie before the main attraction, in this case, the summer hit *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*. "Tummy Trouble" calls for a frazzled Roger to babysit the precocious Baby Herman. Cute as ever, until the cameras stop rolling, Herman swallows a toy rattle, sending Roger on a whiz-bang adventure through a hospital.

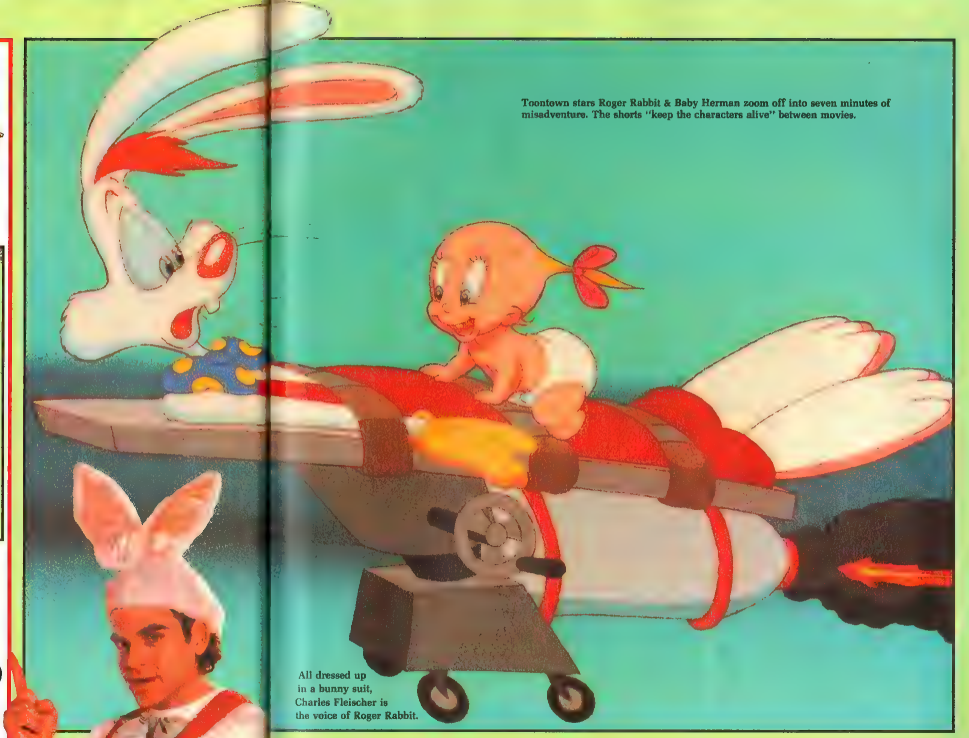
"It's great to be back, ain't it?" says Charles Fleischer, Roger's voice in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and "Tummy Trouble." "But to tell ya the truth, Roger really hasn't been away. With the promotions for the parks and the commercials for Disneyland and Disney World, Roger has been around.

"You need to keep the exposure high for a character like Roger in order to keep him alive. That's one reason these shorts are such a great idea. People could forget about him if he didn't appear between *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and the sequel, which could be four or five years down the line. The shorts keep him out there in the public eye.

" 'Tummy Trouble' is great and the next one, 'Rollercoaster Rabbit,' will be even better. We're doing the animation at the Animation Studio in the Disney-MGM Studios complex in Florida," Fleischer continues. "It will be better for a couple of reasons. One, they learned from *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and 'Tummy Trouble.' Two, they're using some new techniques. What did they learn and what are the new techniques? Huh, you're not letting me off easy on that! Well, the parameters of doing a seven-minute short are different than doing a feature. But I can't tell you too much, because there are things that would be wrong for me to divulge. When 'Rollercoaster Rabbit' comes out, I'll call you at home and I'll point out everything I can't tell you or STARLOG about now. Deal?"

Back in spring 1988, an apprehensive Walt Disney Studios pondered the fate of its highly unusual $50 million hybrid of animation and live-action. Other than the Steven Spielberg name, *Roger Rabbit* boasted little which could lead observers to expect the record-breaking success the movie enjoyed. "I predicted it. I knew when I started working on it. I could have been wrong, certainly," Fleischer muses, "but I wasn't. I said from the very beginning, 'This is going to be big.' Actually, I *was* wrong. I said *Roger Rabbit* would be the biggest movie ever, and it's only number two. But, it's not over yet."

Not by any means. The video prospects of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* have Disney accountants salivating. However, its video release this fall also seems to be stirring passions among fans. Some complain *Roger Rabbit* belongs only in theaters, that the silver screen allows viewers to capture the film's flavor and to see each and every character. Video, they say, is too narrow a medium. Those on the other side, among them Fleischer, point to video's virtues. "You can still see all the characters on the screen and with



Toontown stars Roger Rabbit & Baby Herman zoom off into seven minutes of misadventure. The shorts "keep the characters alive" between movies.

All dressed up in a bunny suit, Charles Fleischer is the voice of Roger Rabbit.

Photos: Bob Penn/Copyright 1988 The Walt Disney Company & Amblin Entertainment

All Tummy Trouble Art: Copyright 1998 Tim Walt Disney Company & Amblin Entertainment

Being asked for his autograph doesn't bother Fleischer. Requests for Jessica Rabbit's phone number are another matter.

a VCR, you'll be able to stop it and look at it frame by frame.

"You'll be able to see things you didn't see the first, or second or third time around. At the animation auction at Sotheby's, I saw a little shop in Toontown which said 'Harecuts' and there was a little rabbit with his ears getting cut. I saw Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Who knows what else is in that film?"

On the heels of *Roger Rabbit* came the Spielberg-Don Bluth animated film *The Land Before Time* (also due on video this fall) and Disney's own popular full-length cartoon, *Oliver & Company*. The future of animation appears bright, and Fleischer smiles when discussing his role in its renaissance. "That's great, it's an honor and I'm proud. I'm glad to have been involved in something that's part of the culture. Kids go, 'P-p-p-p-pieeeeeze!' That's something I was able to project into society."

Out of his own mind or not, Fleischer's stock has risen dramatically as a result of the *Roger Rabbit* association (which he discussed extensively in a STARLOG #138 interview reprinted in STARLOG YEARBOOK #5, now on sale). Fleischer recently signed a long-term contract with Disney, one which provides him with an office on the Disney lot, an upcoming Touchstone Television sitcom to be produced by *ALF*'s Tom Patchett, and the opportunity to write, produce and direct. "Amazing, ain't it?" Fleischer enthuses. "I'm enjoying the best of both worlds. I'm the voice of a rabbit and I'm Charlie Fleischer. Many people do know I'm his voice, and they recognize me because I appeared on the Oscars or on talk shows. Many people call me Roger. They call Robin Williams 'Mork' and they call Sean Connery 'James Bond.' When people call me 'Roger,' it's very amusing because I don't look or sound like him."

Fleischer often draws Roger for children and swears he never tires of doing the rabbit's voice for his fans. "The kids really like it when I draw Roger for them and it's certainly the appropriate character to draw. I love kids, I have two of my own. I love the effect Roger has on kids. He strikes a chord with people in general, but especially young people. I think it's because for all his lunacy, he's really kind of lovable and vulnerable."

Years before *Roger Rabbit*, before he developed his stand-up routine at the Improv and the Comedy Store, Fleischer tuned into *Star Trek* and *Lost in Space* and devoured anything related to science fiction. He also—no great surprise—took to cartoons. "I remember seeing them before films when I was a kid, and I loved them. Now I've got a new perspective. There's something very familiar about seeing Roger," he says. "It's as if he always existed. There's a feeling that he has always been around. At home, there was the Justice League of America. It was very cool to see Batman, Superman, Green Lantern, the Flash and Wonder Woman all working together.

"You know, animation is always changing, even within the confines of *Roger Rabbit*," Fleischer continues, noting that Richard Williams, who oversaw the animation in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (CS #4-5), did not return for "Tummy Trouble." However, many of the animators who toiled for two years under Williams did pick up their pencils again. "The fact that Richard wasn't there and that there were new animators made the animation in 'Tummy Trouble' different. I can see differences, but I have a very discerning eye.

"In the feature, I can also see the differences in the work of the different people drawing Roger," Fleischer continues. "They're very minute stylistic differences and I would doubt the average moviegoer concerns himself with such minutiae. Both crews did a wonderful job."

Continuity may also be a problem when the *Roger Rabbit* sequel heads into high gear. At presstime, several script drafts are in the works, though none have been given a green light. Director Robert Zemeckis has announced publicly (and in interviews in STARLOG) that he intends to maintain his sanity by avoiding any Toontown sequel, leaving a large set of shoes to fill. "Did you see *Batman*? Tim Burton has the chops," Fleischer suggests. "He would be pretty good. But Zemeckis might do it if enough time goes by. He's a genius and uniquely qualified."

As for Charlie Fleischer?

"I'll do the shorts and sequels forever. I love Roger Rabbit. There's a part of him in me as much as there is a part of me in him," Charlie Fleischer says. "I'm secure enough in myself to know people will recognize me for my work pre-Roger and post-Roger, but the fact that people recognize me as Roger is phenomenal. Look at all the opportunities he has given me. I'm indebted to him, so I'll continue to do him. Gladly."

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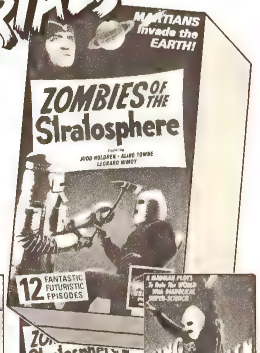

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. . . I enjoy your magazine, and find it a well put-together and entertaining overview of the current comics scene both in print and film, but I would like to express a certain disappointment in your coverage of the Punisher movie.

In the last two issues, you have run consecutive articles on the film, the first with producer Robert Kamen, the following with director Mark Goldblatt. I am the original and solely credited writer on the film. It seems to me that both men, in particular Goldblatt, felt the need to spend almost as much time denigrating the drafts I wrote of the script as talking about their own contributions to the film. That is their right, as unpleasant as it might be to me reading it, but the tone of your articles, particularly the Goldblatt one, by Marc Shapiro, is disturbing. It didn't read like journalism, it read like movie hype. And it took Goldblatt's personal feelings on the script and presented them as unequivocal truisms. I quote—"It didn't take a degree in comic-book lore to realize what was being offered *was Friday the 13th* in sheep's clothing." Of Goldblatt's comment—"This script had many problems."—Shapiro states, "Obviously, these problems have been overcome since. . . ." Has Marc read both scripts, mine and the rewrite? Has he formed an opinion based on the work, or just on the comments of the director? If it is the latter, I would recommend that, in the future, Marc let whomever he is interviewing speak for himself, but form his own opinion based on research and facts. To do otherwise is both lazy and immoral.

I respect the difficulties in trying to publish a serious magazine while keeping it entertaining, and the "wham-biff-zowie" tone that you so deplore in articles about comics in other publications rarely finds its way into your magazine, but this time, it did.

I would also like to express some of my feelings about Goldblatt's comments. I have read the drafts following mine. Goldblatt suffers from the common non-writer's malaise so prevalent in Hollywood—we take an original script, dicker around with it, change dialogue, take a scene that took place here and put it there, and presto, we made it all up ourselves. I am afraid not, Mr. Goldblatt.

As for the decision not to present the Punisher's origin at the beginning of the film, but to integrate it into the film as flashbacks—it was that way in my original script. I fought tooth and nail to keep it that way, and was fired for being uncooperative by the producers, who insisted on a prologue. They later screened it for some fans, and found it worked miserably. If there had not been a flashback sequence in my original script, I doubt they would have had the wherewithal to change it back in the editing room.

Another point I fought for was keeping the skull on the Punisher's shirt—which Kamen and Goldblatt dismiss with statements such as "When you put Dolph Lundgren in spandex, you gotta watch out, cause he'd look pretty silly." Please. In my script, he wore almost exactly what he wears in the film, only he spray-painted the skull onto his T-shirt. At a certain point, I gave up on the skull for most of the film, and had him spray-paint a kevlar vest just for the climactic sequence. Even that was rejected by the producer as being "too comic-booky." The fact is, there is a way to do comics on film and maintain their integrity, but the producers of this film have, sadly, little respect for the medium they were adapting.

As for the claim that in my script the Punisher was "Jason with a cape"—well, my draft was more violent than the rewrites, although not by very much; the main difference being mine had more hand-to-hand combat, rather than the endless machine-gun fire it has become.

The Punisher I presented was tormented and tough, and his moments of humanity were few and far-between, but when they surfaced, they meant something. The Punisher as he is now is a more vague and amorphous character than in my drafts, and, I think, a less interesting and charismatic one. At any rate, what we see is what we'll get.

I did my best, bringing the Punisher to New World's attention when they had no idea of who he even was, then writing the story and screenplay on which the movie is based. I hope that the fans, of which I am one, will not be too disappointed with the dilutions of the character, and enjoy the resulting film as best as they can.

Boaz Yakin
Calforna

. . . Now, let me get this straight: *Punisher* movie producer Robert Kamen thinks "the movie is the essence of the comic book." yet doesn't use the original costume because "it would have looked too much like a comic book." This type of attitude is the reason most fans sometimes dread their favorite characters being made into movies. The filmmakers buy the character because it is a hot property, then turn around and trash what made the character hot in the first place.

I think this may be a carryover from the *Batman* TV show which was about comic-book characters and wasn't ashamed to admit it. But, since most fans complain about the show, producers are now afraid to give productions about comic-book characters that comic-book look. Instead of looking like the vigilante we all know and love (or, in some cases, loathe), the Punisher looks like a second-rate copy of Sylvester Stallone's *Cobra* character.

Willie Holmes
Chicago, IL

. . . I'm writing in response to the increasing amount of disregard being given to comic-book adaptations to the screen. It's always wonderful to see four-color characters brought to life, but why are the studios habitually redefining their look? One of the most disheartening examples is Daredevil, who looked more like a ninja than his comic-book counterpart in the recent *Hulk* TV-movie. And what about his predecessor Thor, whose TV incarnation bore little resemblance to the Marvel Comics god? And though the upcoming *Punisher* film may be one of the most faithful adaptations of a Marvel character to date, the studio could have saved face with many fans by simply having its star sport a black T-shirt with a skull on it. That certainly wouldn't have made the film look any more like a comic book. After all, if the characters are successful enough to be brought to the screen, why mess with success?

Craig B. Mote
Tray, OH

. . . I recently viewed *The Trial of the Incredible Hulk*, and decided to offer my views.

This is the second Hulk movie, at least in the sense that they revived it with *The Incredible Hulk Returns*, which guest starred Thor. This new movie is somehow more believable than the previous one. The film was definitely well written, and its visual aspects seemed much improved.

What I like about the movie is that it seemed more like Marvel Comics. Take Daredevil, for example. Even though the costume was different, the character's continuity seemed to be there. His origin, even down to the fact that his father was a boxer, seemed to parallel the comics, rather than contradict them. Thor didn't parallel the comics at all. Even Daredevil's arch-enemy, the Kingpin, was present. I realize that DD's costume was black instead of red, but this really makes sense. Isn't Daredevil supposed to be a "creature of the night"?

Now for the Hulk. The TV version is almost nothing like the comics. Yet, despite the differences between the comics and the film presentations, I really loved the way that Lou Ferrigno portrays the Hulk. It's not at all corny, and he seems more like the Marvel Comics Hulk. He was not only savage, but ruthless and merciless. Ferrigno even looks like the Hulk. This, quite honestly, has been his best portrayal of the Hulk so far.

Tim H. Moss
200 West B. Street
Erwin, NC 28339

. . . Bill Bixby, Lou Ferrigno, Rex Smith and the rest of the cast all put in good performances. However, John Rhys-Davies as Fisk reminded me of Lex Luthor in *Superman IV: The Quest For Peace* by gathering up the top criminals of the world to show that he has defeated his arch-enemy and reap the rewards. Nicholas Hormann as Edgar seemed more like the comic-book Fisk than the Fisk portrayed in this movie. I also think a *Daredevil* TV series could prove very entertaining to the fans of both this movie and the comic book. Rex Smith as Daredevil? I think so. But pleeeease give Daredevil his red suit and horns. As is, he looks more like a common cat burglar instead of the crimefighter he is.

Shawn Phillips
Address Withheld

. . . One of your readers referred to Michael Keaton as "a short, balding, wimpy comedian." Well, Alan Ladd was short, Sean Connery is bald, the wimpy accusation is too stupid to bother replying to, and Jackie Gleason was a comedian, but no one can imagine anyone better portraying Shane, James Bond or Minnesota Fats. Physical attributes being for the most part God-given, a real actor depends on creating an illusion of reality to a character who exists only in a 120-page script. If Batman was cast solely on physical appearance, then Dolph Lundgren would have been hired in a minute. However, since Jack Nicholson will blow any ordinary beefcake actor off the screen with a mere lift of an eyebrow, you better make sure you have an actor who can hold his own against Nicholson. One of the few actors in Hollywood who can match Nicholson blow for blow is Keaton, since he possesses the timing, presence and charisma needed for a Nicholson adversary.

Can Keaton handle the action sequences? Check out a little-seen movie called *Touch and Go*, where Keaton played a hockey player who has to kick butt inside and outside the rink. As for his slender build (which is my one point of concern)—what the hell, Bruce Lee had a slender build and I bet he could have given Arnold Schwarzenegger a bloody nose.

Finally, I believe that in order to have a convincing Batman, you must have a convincing Bruce Wayne, since there is an ongoing conflict within the character of which is the disguise and which is the real identity. Even Sam Hamm's script approaches this question, and I believe Keaton would be more convincing as a millionaire playboy in a tuxedo than Mr. Universe.

The bottom line? Let's be realistic—the idea of a guy running around in a cape, pointed ears, and longjohns beating up on bad guys is a little bit on the goofy side, no matter *who* plays it, Keaton or Gregory Peck (who is my personal choice for the character).

Michael J. Hickey
Address Withheld

. . . I enjoy your magazine, especially the issues with Batman in them.

I have a suggestion though. Put a couple of posters in them, and you would have an even better magazine.

Josh Tatum
1227 Seaton Road T-42
Durham, NC 27713

For those who like their comics coverage with posters, check out COMICS SCENE SPECTACULAR #1, the one with the Bat-logo. It's full of good stuff. It's on your local newsstand or order directly from us ($3.95 + $1.50 postage, checks payable to STARLOG PRESS) at COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Avenue South, 8th Flr, NY, NY 10016.

. . . I'm writing to express my disappointment and confusion over the abrupt cancellation of one of my favorite DC Comics titles: *The Shadow*.

I would simply like an answer explaining the title's demise. I know that there are many reasons for a book to be cancelled but none was given in the sources I read, and there was no indication in the book itself.

I enjoyed *The Shadow* enormously and looked forward to it every month for its great action, terrific characters and hilarious black humor. What particularly annoyed me was that the powers-that-be couldn't wait for the story to end before axing the book. There are so many unanswered questions: Will the Shadow get his signet ring and body back? What is Shiwan Khan up to, now that he has a powerful robotic body?

If DC is unable to revive the title, could another comic company pick up *The Shadow* stories from the 1970s?

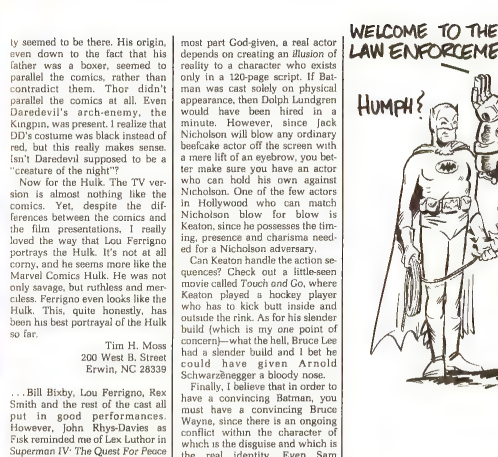
Dennis Kininger
Oriskany, NY

DC is planning to wrap up the dangling storylines in a forthcoming special. Meanwhile, Gerard Jones and Eduardo Barreto's The Shadow Strikes! *appears this month, courtesy of the same company. DC has also reissued those '70s* Shadow *stories (by Denny O'Neil & Mike Kaluta) in hardcover form.*

. . . I would like to take a moment to thank you for your excellent editorial in COMICS SCENE #7 concerning death in comics, particularly in the recent *Nick Fury vs. SHIELD* series.

I was looking forward to that series, as I've always been a big fan of Nick and his SHIELD guys, but as it progressed, I merely got more and more disenchanted. Not only were Nick's friends turning against him, but everyone in the entire series was acting vastly out of character! Does anyone really believe that Jimmy Woo, who opposed the Yellow Claw in his very first appearance, would turn against Nick? And what about Jasper Sitwell? Come on, guys, anyone who knows these characters would realize that they

WANTED!?? MORE HEROES LIKE THE MIGHTY THOR. She's not Beta-Ray Bill but she *does* carry the Uru hammer, Mjolnir, into marvelous action. Thus knowest her best as one of the young stars of *Adventures in Babysitting*, actress Maia Brewton, who portrayed a very mighty Thor fan in the hit comedy from director/comics buff Chris (*Gremlins*) Columbus.



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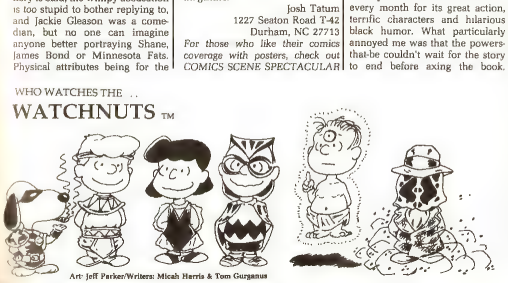

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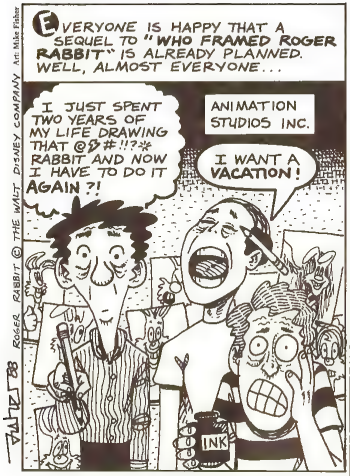
EVERYONE IS HAPPY THAT A SEQUEL TO "WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT" IS ALREADY PLANNED. WELL, ALMOST EVERYONE...
I JUST SPENT TWO YEARS OF MY LIFE DRAWING THAT @$#!?% RABBIT AND NOW I HAVE TO DO IT AGAIN?!
ANIMATION STUDIOS INC.
I WANT A VACATION!
ROGER RABBIT © THE WALT DISNEY COMPANY Art: Mike Fisher
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are being written vastly out of character!

In this issue, you have an interview with Bob Harris, who wrote the mini-series, and he says that he had never read an issue of the original series and wasn't a fan of it. Well, I must say it showed. Why did Mark Gruenwald ask someone who wasn't familiar with the old series to write a new mini-series? Maybe because he knew he had picked someone who would support his desire to kill off all of the characters? Everyone knows how fond Gruenwald is of pointless deaths. Look at how many characters he killed in his accursed "Scourge" storyline! And what was the point of all that? Who out there thinks that Slug and the other "villains" that Gruenwald came up with are better villains than the ones he killed off? What was wrong with the Melter? Cheetah?

What really amazes me is how many people want to see characters killed off. Don't they realize that killing a character is nothing but a stupid waste of potential? But there's more to it than that. The deaths in comics today are mostly in stories which are so poorly written that it is obvious that they are merely done just so the writer can kill off the character, one that he or she doesn't like. That's not a legitimate reason. If you don't like the character, don't use him or her. Don't write the character. The readers will be all the better for it.

Jeff Melton
4732 Long Leaf Hills Drive
Wilmington, NC 28403

For a view on how the pros feel about "death in the comics," see Thought Balloons on page 48.

. . . With all this talk about casting movies based on comics (*Batman, Judge Dredd*, etc.), I think it's time to throw in my two bits.

For the upcoming *Flintstones* movie, Betty Rubble can *only* be played by Valerie Bertinelli! Give her the right hairdo and costume, and we're talking dead ringer here! Speaking of which, put some glasses and a tie on Wil Wheaton, and he would look just like Steve Ditko's Peter Parker! Not to mention he's the right age!

For the Watchmen, John Malkovich would be great as Rorschach, even if he is a little too tall. And how about Burt Reynolds as the Comedian?

I understand Corey Haim is to play Archie Andrews. How about Corey Feldman as Archie's pal, Reggie? And, of course, Jughead can only be played by the actor who portrayed Cameron Frye in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* [Alan Ruck] although I would accept Keanu Reeves in a pinch.

If a *Bloom County* movie is ever made, I would like to see Robert Downey Jr. play Steve Dallas. And if an *X-Men* movie is ever made, I could see Patrick Stewart as Professor X and Jody Watley as Storm.

I would certainly like to hear what others have to say.

Todd P. Emerson
12456 North Park Avenue
Seattle, WA 98133

I was very disturbed to read Daniel Dickholtz' comments in his preface to the Alan Moore interview. Dickholtz made a couple of grossly inaccurate statements which I feel need refuting. Firstly, Dickholtz said, "While the political atmosphere of modern England grew more oppressive . . ." in relation to the period when Moore created the *V for Vendetta* series. Having survived the oppressive years of the 1970s when the country was all but brought to its knees by rampant socialism, I find it objectionable that someone can call modern England "oppressive." The only excuse for such misguided remarks is ignorance, but I would suggest Dickholtz not rely on this as justification for such inaccuracy in the future. Relating to this, Dickholtz went on to claim that the "British government attempted to introduce legislation intended to eliminate their own gay communities." No such legislation has been introduced nor attempted, to my knowledge. I think Dickholtz is victim of the same misconception as a number of people who tend to react with their hearts rather than their heads to any measure aimed at introducing common sense in an area previously bogged down in emotive rhetoric and misguided wooly-mindedness. The government has legislated to curb the spread of AIDS, not homosexuality. That the two are inextricably tied together is not the government's fault. The mentality that deliberately confuses the facts in such a manner is responsible for doing great damage to the cause of peaceful co-existence of racial, sexual and political groups and the formation of *A.A.R.G.H.* is a result of such mischief-making and will not help anyone in the long run.

Dale Coe
56, Whitecross Road,
Cheshire, WA5 1LR, England.

The legislation that most concerns the contributors to A.A.R.G.H. are Clauses 28 and 29 of a local authority bill. Clause 29 states, "A local authority shall not promote homosexuality . . . or the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality." As for Clause 28, Lord Caithness, the Local Government Minister, said publicly that it is intended to attack "the whole gamut of homosexual acts, homosexual relationships, even the abstract concept."

. . . If Alan Moore is so against all forms of censorship, then why did he allow the Comics Code seal to be placed on early *Swamp Thing* stories, and why does he want to deny people their right to speak out against any movie or book? What about *our* freedom of speech?

I would also like to take issue with his view that fundamentalists believe that women should only be in the kitchen. For his information, Phyllis Schlafly, president of the religious political group Eagle Forum, did graduate work at Harvard University, and Jerry Falwell's daughter is studying to be a doctor; *that's* not done in a kitchen!

Larry J. King
Box 1890 Bridge Street
Morrisville, VT 05661

. . . This is in response to the letter from Craig Ingerto in CS#7: Craig, what's so wrong about the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* series? I've seen just about every episode and I can't find anything so terribly wrong about it. And I, too, am an admirer of Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird's work. Haven't you heard of a term called *adaptation*? Apparently not. If you were to bring the Turtles directly to TV as they are in the comics, they would be cut down by the censors and various groups so quickly, it would amaze you. "Smurfs with lethal weapons"? Ha! I would rather watch these four "heroes in a half-shell" than those overly happy, sugar-coated, little blue pests. Also, never have I seen any one of those "lethal weapons" used on a person.

I applaud the idea that the Turtles have made it to TV and into the toy stores. They're a little more accessible to the public now than they were in the past. The comic book hasn't suffered at all, it still has the same spirit as before. And I'm not ashamed to admit that the foursome (in toy form) adorn my bookshelf in various battle poses. They never sold out, Craig. They just opened up a little more. And they are not "cute" and "furry." Just good clean *fun*.

Jon Marshall
Dover, OH

. . . I am very happy with the news that COMICS SCENE is going bimonthly. I think the big difference is color and pages not wasted on classified ads. Now two things that bug me: 1. The Comics Code Authority, who are these people? Why do they have the right to censor other people's thoughts? Do they have real jobs? 2. Junk mail: I like getting mail from other comic-book fans but this junk mail has got to go. Michael Skully is right, it seems when you get your name printed, you are a target for all the crud with a pen and something to sell.

D.A. Webb
Washington, NC

Lords of the Ring

The world of "The Hobbit" takes a new form.

By SCOTT LOBDELL

It must have been Gollum's idea. The formation of the creative team for Eclipse's three-issue comic-book adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* could only have come from that legendary creature's

What is a hobbit?
I suppose hobbits need some description nowadays, since they have become rare and shy of the Big People, as they call us.
They are small people, smaller than dwarves. They are inclined to be fat in the stomach; they dress in bright colors and wear no shoes, because their feet grow natural leathery soles and thick warm brown hair.
The mother of this particular hobbit — of Bilbo Baggins, that is — was the famous Belladonna Took. Once in a while members of the Took-clan would go and have adventures. They discreetly disappeared, and the family hushed it up; the Tooks were not as respectable as the Bagginses.
It is probable that Bilbo, Belladonna's only son, although he looked and behaved like his father, got something a bit queer in his make-up from the Took side, something that only waited for a chance to come out.
Oh.
All Hobbit Art: Copyright 1988 Dave Wenzel/Eclipse Books

"I was surprised by Dave [Wenzel's] version of Bilbo," notes writer Chuck Dixon of the artist's change of Hobbit.

insidiously mischievous mind. After all, just who else would have thought to assign this fully-painted Prestige format series to a writer with a penchant for jet planes and hand-grenades and an artist who, up until now, was reknowned for having drawn the final issue of DC's mid-70s title *Kong the Untamed*? Nonetheless, it's an idea that works.

"I used to write children's books, which is one of the reasons why [Eclipse Editor] cat yronwode wanted me to do this," explains writer Chuck Dixon, whose more action-packed work, which includes *Airboy* and *Alien Legion*, he discussed in CS #7. "Even though in comics I'm known for the fast pace and a great many guns and big, muscled guys beating each other up and all that kind of stuff, my background really is Winnie the Pooh and Raggedy Ann and Andy. I can put on that hat and approach the work from that aspect. Tolkien's work is very similar to A.A. Milne's Pooh, so I found it pretty easy to slide in.

"Some people at Eclipse were afraid of the Chuck Dixonism, but every word is Tolkien's. I haven't done anything but adapt it," he says casually, as if adapting one of this planet's most-read stories was a simple matter. "It sometimes feels like the world's longest book report. My biggest job is to pace it out. I just decide which dialogue stays and which goes, condensing certain scenes, but I'm not changing a thing. There isn't anything in this mini-series that isn't in *The Hobbit*."

Artist Dave Wenzel's job is a bit more difficult. The project challenges this hardcore *Hobbit* fan to render each issue's 44 pages with his own vision of the classic adventure of Bilbo Baggins. He views all the rereading as a labor of love.

"I don't know if everybody does this," Wenzel explains, "but I find when I read, I speed up so that some of the details pass away because I'm interested in getting to the plot. But when I have to imagine what the cliff looked like on the left, and what kind of fir tree is growing out of it, it adds a great deal of fun to visualizing it!"

It wasn't the dealings with the denizens of Middle-Earth that worried them, but rather the millions of *Hobbit* admirers worldwide. "The biggest intimidation isn't from Tolkien's writing," reveals Dixon, noting that the material was easily adaptable to comics. "It actually comes from all the fans! I've run into many people who have read the book *annually*. In the process of adapting the story, I'm catching up with them."

Wenzel, however, doesn't feel the heat from the horde of Hobbit-heads. "I've always trusted, a lot, my vision of what *The Hobbit* should look like. I've always felt that what I had going on in my head was pretty good."

The artist even credits Tolkien's world of dwarves, dragons and danger with the development of his own artistic style. "As a kid, I had always done Bigfoot-like cartoons and realistic art, but I never knew how to combine the two. When I was in college, I read *The Hobbit* and learned how to combine it all. I think it's probably the only classic children's book written in this century."

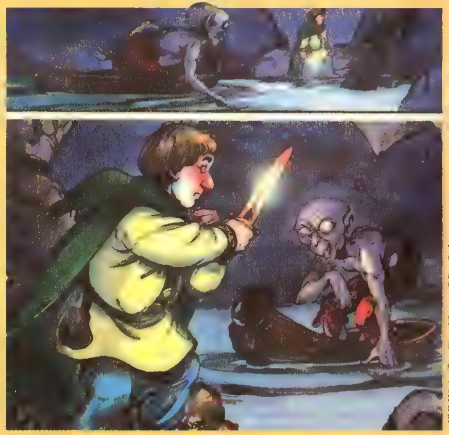
Dixon believes that Wenzel's illustrations will sell *The Hobbit* to a mainstream audience.

"It's a very charming book," Dixon agrees. "Tolkien had a knack for being able to balance whimsy and terrible threats. The book is gentle, then it's exciting, then it goes to scary, then back to a gentle humor again. Bilbo's development as a character is very good."

"Unlike many projects I used to work on in comics," explains Wenzel, "where there is an established character format like Superman or Batman, with *The Hobbit* there *isn't* a definitive interpretation." He finds it odd, considering that by his estimation, "here is a character where probably every kid who comes out of high school has read *The Hobbit*, yet it has never been done. In a way, that's the disappointing thing, I almost don't want to provide a standard envisionment for it. I believe very much in imagination, and yet, here I am providing the imagination for everybody."

Chuck Dixon points out "everyone's interpretation is different of every character. Gandalf [the wizard] seems to be the only one everyone gets the same mental picture of, but everyone has a discrepancy over how his words look. I was surprised by Dave's version of Bilbo. He didn't fit with my image, but once I read it. . . ."

"Readers may have envisioned Bilbo differently," Wenzel concedes. "Tolkien always presented Bilbo as part of an 18th century gentry, with the waistcoat and all that, within a medieval society. For me, it was always kind of contradictory. In our version, he doesn't quite have the waistcoat. I've gone ahead and interpreted it my own way."



To satisfy Tolkien fans, Dixon and Wenzel have kept Gollum's scenes virtually intact.

Dixon admits he wasn't as familiar with the intricacies of the minions of Mirkwood. "I enjoyed the work, though I'm not as big a fanatic as it turns out many people are. In some ways, it's good that I'm not that big a fan because I can be crueler when I have to go in and cut scenes to make it work in comics.

"It's painful sometimes, because everyone has pet sentences, pet scenes they would like to see given the full treatment. We had to decide which ones were the most important in telling the story."

However, Dixon promises, "Mal gets full treatment, Gollum gets full treatment, those scenes are done almost exactly as they are in the book, right up to every line of dialogue. But there comes a time in some of the different fight or chase scenes when we had to go in and snip stuff out for brevity's sake."

"When they give you 'x' amount of pages, you probably wish you had about 200 more than you have," Wenzel says by way of revealing his initial difficulties with the necessary editing. "At first, I wanted *every* sentence in there and *every* nuance. I went out and got *The Hobbit* on tape and just listened to that. I realized halfway through it that it wasn't the whole book, but I thought it was. It *sounded* like the whole book. So, I realized you don't need every sentence in there."

While Tolkien fans are sure to snap up this series, is there any guarantee the mainstream comic fan will do the same? Dixon believes so. "I think *The Hobbit*'s reputation might pull many of them over. 'Hobbit' may not be a household word everywhere, but I'm sure in a comic-book fan's household, it has been thrown around a few times. We might draw a few of them over, but the book doesn't have to rely on them. We'll catch many non-comics readers in the mainstream bookstores.

"It's the only successful cross I've ever seen between illustration and comics. It works as both. It's a sumptuously illustrated book, and it also reads very well as a comic book. This is going to be a perennial seller as being the closest adaptation to *The Hobbit* yet in any illustrative form."

There have been many, although fantasy has yet to catch fire in the hearts of the general public. Whereas ventures such as Wendy Pini's *Elfquest* was a critical success, the illustration graveyard is filled with the casualties of those who have adapted Tolkien's words. No one connected with this latest adaptation is concerned with the statistics that include Ralph Bakshi's *Lord of the Rings* movie and the two animated TV specials.

"The movie adaptation has had enough time to die. They've run it on pay cable and it's on video," says Wenzel. Though careful not to slight the animated feature film, he notes, "The sad thing about the movie version was that it left so much out. I'm hoping the kids didn't think that's all there was to it." As to whether fans will dismiss the book as a movie adaptation, he is confident. "Once you see the cover and the details, you'll *know* it couldn't have been done for animation."

Dixon holds similar views on the failure of fantasy in the mainstream. "I think this *Hobbit* stands a better chance because this is the original source," he says, noting Wendy Pini's *Elfquest* as the exception. "The reason *Elfquest* stands out is it was coming from the heart as opposed to the others that were just commercial properties put together by some people. *Elfquest* is Wendy's, and every page has a great deal of love in it.

"In this case, our secret weapon is Dave Wenzel because the art is simply astounding. I'm really proud just to have my name connected to this project, mostly because of what he has produced."

Before this sounds like two pros backpatting their way through a collaboration, note Dixon's comments on their unique working style. "To tell you the truth, we haven't been in communication very much. I had spoken to him before I wrote the first book to get a feel of what he expected from it, because I didn't want to do anything different from what he wanted, and we were in agreement that it should be an illustrated book, rather than just simply a comic retelling. He should have room for large panels or full-page sections, and I was sensitive to that. Mostly editor Sean Demming has been running between the both of us, doing the chore of collaborating for us. I haven't really spoken to Dave since then. I should."

As Dave Wenzel's dream draws to its conclusion, he ponders how the dream compares to the reality. "I never envisioned in my whole life that I would draw Bilbo Baggins as many times as I have!"

"I've probably worked harder on *The Hobbit* than on anything else I've ever done on my own," Chuck Dixon adds. "It's going to have a huge readership and I want to make sure we make some of them happy."

"This is going to be a perennial seller as the closest adaptation of *The Hobbit* yet," declares Dixon.

An Eternity Behind a Typewriter

By KATHY SELBERT

Paul Ryan O'Connor writes on, still trying to figure out just what his readers and his publisher really want.

It was as bloodless and as soulless a little bastard child as you can imagine. The characters *didn't* interest me. I didn't really want to work on *New Humans* at all. But I said, 'All right. I'll write it for three issues or so. I could use the cash.'

"And every month, I would sit down to write *New Humans* and say, 'God, I don't want to write this.' So, I took my anger out on the book by writing improbable situations, tough characters doing weird things, and just doing as I pleased. And every time, they said they liked it!"

That was early 1988. Today, nearly a dozen issues later, Paul Ryan O'Connor is still the writer of *New Humans*.

Like its companion title, *Ex-Mutants*, which O'Connor has far more willingly been writing, *New Humans* takes place on Earth, but an Earth devastated by a push-button war with dirty nukes and E-bombs that obliterated technology and mutated what little life remained.

In space while the war occurred, the New Humans are the last "pure" humans on the planet. Throughout their adventures, they hunt for other survivors.

Ex-Mutants, by contrast, are mutants genetically engineered to appear fully human. The four women and one man, each a perfect "10," do what they can to restore some measure of civilization to Earth, despite their naivete and the problems caused by their unique personalities.

But these are far from O'Connor's only titles. The writer began his career in comics in 1987 with *Bones: So This is Life After Death?*, a limited series he created.

This line of dialogue—"By the time I came to, I had already begun to decompose"—is an early tip-off that *Bones* wasn't just another sword & sorcery comic book. It's the story of Seymour, a living skeleton, who after 300 years escapes the torments of his fellow undead, only to find himself in a medieval world with trolls, evil knights, boy kings and a novice necromancer named Ursula.

Art: Myke & Doug Hazelwood

"I took my anger out on the book by writing improbable situations," says Paul Ryan O'Connor, explaining why he gave hellraiser Gabriella Fish of *The New Humans* a brief holiday.

"When it became evident that both my friend Chris Ulm [now Editor-in-Chief at Eternity] and I would be writing comics, we shotgunned some ideas to see what we could come up with," explains O'Connor. "One of them was something called *Monster Comics*, because I like monsters. I like creepy things, and I can sympathize with something that crawls out of a pit and scares people far more than I can with someone who puts on gleaming armor and is a hero. So, it was out of that impulse that *Bones* came about.

"I wanted a character who was deliberately *not* human," O'Connor elaborates. "*Bones* was supposed to be about a true anti-hero. He was to be a flesh-eating ghoul, a truly despicable individual, but at the same time, internally self-consistent and humorous.

"When we got together with Malibu Graphics [which has since merged with Eternity], they bought *Liberator*, which was a separate title altogether and a little better developed, for six issues. Then, at the meeting's end, they said, 'Well, we'll take four issues of the skeleton man.' "

Given right of approval on the artist, O'Connor chose Bryon Carson, another first-timer. "I liked Bryon's style—mainly cartoonish. And he was the first who genuinely wanted to see *Bones* work.

"It was a unique situation. At the time, I was managing The Last Grenadier, a gaming store in Northridge, California, and Bryon happened to live right behind the store. He used to bring me the pages as he drew them, and it enabled me to

revise it and improve it, as he went along. He really slaved over the pencils, adjusting things on a panel-by-panel basis."

The first issue of *Bones* appeared on the stands in August 1987, and sold moderately well for a black and white comic. The fall-off rate (the sales of the first issue vs. sales of successive issues) was fairly low. While not many people read it, those who did apparently liked it.

It's the story of two "Liberators," military men who were turned into superheroes through drugs and technology, to help the Allies win World War II. One retired and became a senator. The other refused to give up his powers. When America invades Nicaragua, he makes sure he's in the front line, no matter what the cost.

"I'm sad about that one, actually," O'Connor laments. "I still think it was a pretty good book. Production delays really hurt because it was a topical story that needed to come out monthly for six months. As it turned out, it took the better part of one-and-a-half years to publish it.

"*Liberator* had a very good storyline, though it was probably a more complex story than I should have tried to write at that stage in my career. A bit too clever for its own good. It would have been difficult to hold readers' interest from issue to issue on a month to month basis. When the issues staggered out every two to three months..."

Shortly after *Liberator* debuted came O'Connor's biggest heartbreak, *Empire*. "It remains my favorite comic, a story which brought together my two favorite passions: science fiction and history. It was essentially a space opera based on, of all things, the reign of Henry II of England, rewritten as a science-fiction epic with the various provinces of England and France as planets.

"*Empire* was a book I really poured my heart and soul into, and we had excellent art from John Gallagher. I was really enthusiastic about the idea. Everything worked just great. It had a sense of atmosphere, I had a long-range idea of where the book was going, and all the characters were just right. I felt really good about it.

"It *died*. The series was cancelled before the first issue hit the stands. The market is the ultimate arbiter, so I really can't complain. We ended up getting four issues out.

"One of *Empire*'s failings was that it really couldn't be summed up too well in one phrase. There wasn't anything you could put your finger on and say, 'This is what it's about.' That hurt when it came time to order it."

Orders were placed for the first three issues before the first *Empire* hit the stands. The numbers were so low, it was obvious that the book was dead. "At that point, I threw my hands up. I obviously didn't know what it was comic-book fans want, so I told Eternity, 'You guys give me things to write and I'll do it.' In effect, I became the Eternity staff writer. That's how I ended up doing *New Humans*, *Ex-Mutants* and now *Tiger-X*."

Tiger-X was created by Ben Dunn, the originator of *Ninja High School*, an Americanized manga. Before Eternity acquired the rights and published an earlier mini-series, *Tiger-X* appeared as a strip in a Japanese fanzine. This summer, Eternity began a four-issue run of new stories written by O'Connor.

"The premise is that the United States has been invaded by the Soviet Union through a series of machinations that are part of an ultra-rightist's worst nightmare. The U.S. falls without a fight and the people are reduced to servants for their Soviet masters."

All is not lost, however, because the Americans have a secret weapon, Tiger-X, a giant robot. Jordy is the person who controls the robot, and while he must come to grips with the awesome power at his command, the "servants" of America must deal with the daily problems of being a conquered nation.

"Everything I've done," O'Connor says, "has been run past Ben Dunn for his approval, and so far, he has liked what he has seen. There were a few minor changes on issue #1 that we implemented, but that's it.

"Admittedly, I would much prefer to work on my own stuff, but you have to pay the bills." This brings O'Connor to his newest project, an original sword and sorcery book called *Bad Axe*, due out in October from Eternity's Adventurer Line.

"It's an absurd title. The whole reason to call something *Bad Axe* is just to get attention. It's a title every bit as absurd as *He-Man*, but when you say something often enough, it becomes like a mantra, and then, it doesn't sound stupid anymore."

Bad Axe is fantasy for those who hate fantasy, O'Connor claims. "It's really more of an ancient myth story than sword and sorcery. It's not necessarily a pleasant story and doesn't have a happy ending.

"It sets up characters which are sympathetic, and for whom you feel. You're rooting for them and they're your heroes, but they screw up. They sleep with the wrong people. They're taken for a ride without realizing it."

Aside from that, O'Connor confesses he "can't say much about it because I don't want to reveal the plot. Most of the story depends on not knowing what's going on.

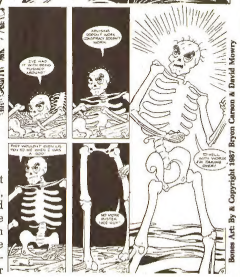
"Why is there this strange wolf-girl character? Why is there a savage battle-god bathing in the blood of sacrifices? What's the connection between those two? Why is this demon character, Bad Axe, sacking one city after another and commiting genocide against teenage boys? It all ties in."

O'Connor's background is as uncommon as his stories. His passion for history began as a young child when his older brother, an avid war gamer, would "occasionally tolerate my presence" and allow O'Connor to observe

(continued on page 68)

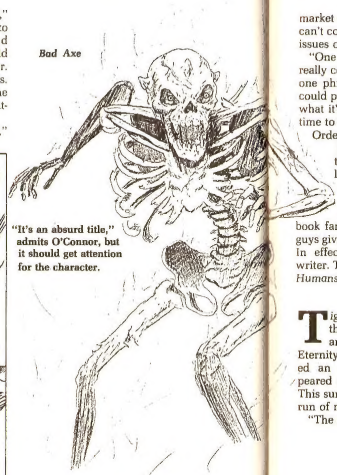
Art: Marc Mateo/Jimmy Palmiotti/©Copyright 1988 Eternity Comics Inc.

With a nod to those other marvelous uncanny heroes, the *Ex-Mutants* battle to restore a *Shattered Earth*.



Bones Art: By & Copyright 1987 Bryan Senior & David Murray

Meet Seymour the skeleton who heralded O'Connor's entry into comics.



Bad Axe

"It's an absurd title," admits O'Connor, but it should get attention for the character.

Empire Art: By & Copyright 1988 John Gallagher & Ben Schaefer

Combining history and SF, *Empire* retold the tale of Henry II, but failed to gather a readership.

Designer: Mitch Foust

All Artwork: Courtesy Paul Ryan O'Connor/Eternity Comics

Tanree is the enigmatic wolf-girl from O'Connor's own sword and sorcery epic *Bad Axe* from Adventure Comics.

O'Connor

(continued from page 67)

him and his friends playing games like *Midway* and *Waterloo*. O'Connor didn't always understand them, but he was fascinated by the battles and the history which surrounded them.

Soon, he was creating his own games and decided to make a career of it when he grew up. This dream came true during the two years he spent designing games for Flying Buffalo in Phoenix. O'Connor's most recent game design projects are *BattleTech*, for Eternity, and a fantasy computer game for Interplay, *Dragon War*, which begins where most fantasy computer games end, with the heroes retiring. In this case, however, they find their "retirement home" has been taken over by evil.

O'Connor's love of science fiction began around age 10, when he came across the Doc Savage stories reprinted in paperback by Bantam. His father recognized them as the pulps he had read when he was young, and seeing his son's interest, encouraged it. Before long, O'Connor was also reading Fritz Leiber, Michael Moorcock, Edgar Rice Burroughs and Jack Vance, among others.

He didn't discover comic books until he was 12, when he was introduced to them "by a creepy, odd friend."

O'Connor had been reading comics for a while before he realized that "some creative effort went into presenting these things." The first time this happened, he turned back to the splash page to see the name. It was Jim Starlin. The comic was an issue of *Captain Marvel*, and O'Connor still remembers the villain, Nitro, the Exploding Man. "I really liked the way the story was told, the visual storytelling skills."

Though black and white comics were not what he read when he was younger, he enjoys working in that medium, at least for now. "Personally, I'm a b&w fan, not necessarily of comics, but b&w movies. I don't see it as an inferior medium; I don't see it as something that's missing. It takes a superior artist to work in b&w. Take a color comic and try to imagine it in b&w. If it looks like a Whitman coloring book, it points up a serious hole. If an artist looks good in b&w, he's damn good, or the inker is damn good."

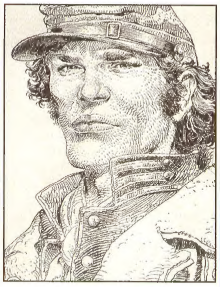
O'Connor has every intention of continuing to write comics. "I figure, what, I'm 26? I've got a lot of time to write comics—the rest of my life. They aren't something I'm writing on the way to something else. I genuinely *like* comics. I'll continue to write them as long as it's fun.

"I did a comics adaptation of *The Three Musketeers* for Eternity and have a standing invitation: Anytime anyone wants to adapt *War and Peace*, I want to do it." Paul Ryan O'Connor grins. "It should only take a thousand or so issues."

Blueberry

(continued from page 12)

Still, American comics fans haven't seen a Western comic from a major publisher since DC's *Jonah Hex* shifted to an apocalyptic SF storyline four years ago. Why should Americans find *Blueberry* so exciting? "It's Moebius' artwork, beautifully drawn. You'll see what other artists have been swiping," Clark says. "And it's a good story, a regular page-turner: one man's struggle to do his duty for his country and, when no one believes him that the gold is gone, to prove his innocence. Blueberry is the archetypal American hero *despite* the strip's French origins. He has his own set of values and he lives by them. It's *not* your typical Western story."



Does Margaret Clark think a successful American edition of *Lt. Blueberry* could revive the Western genre in comics? It's a possibility, she says, but she's not pinning her hopes on it. "I'm sure the movie studios were really surprised when *Young Guns* and *Lonesome Dove* were hits. If *Blueberry* sells well, it could get the comics companies thinking, 'Where did we put all those old Western characters?' I don't know if you should judge *Blueberry* by that, though. It has a $12.95 price tag and that, unfortunately, will limit its appeal.

"As an Epic editor, we're always looking for new genres. When we started doing SF at the beginning, SF wasn't being done much in comics—it was considered a drug on the market. I did a superhero book in the past year, but it was hard to convince Kent Williams and Jay Muth to put Havok and Wolverine in their costumes. It was superheroics but with a difference. That difference is what Epic is all about—having the flexibility to do the different."

Including a Western with a French twist.

Honkytonk

(continued from page 16)

over the world: They're obnoxious, they expect to be waited on hand and foot, and they want to kill anyone within five miles of anything that's theirs. Those are traits you can see in Japan and Africa and Italy and Boston."

Does this describe even Bell himself? "*Of course!*" he booms merrily. "I wouldn't be honest if I said it doesn't. Men are very territorial, aggressive, very much a peacock. Western men have their own version of this, which is basically to deny all of the above, and act like they're above that."

Bell admits there is a major contradiction in the self-reliant females of the Great Outdoors. "They are probably even more subservient, symbolically, toward men. Here's the paradox. You ask a Western woman if she's tough and independent, and she might admit it. But hint at being equal or above her man, and she'll say, 'No way. My man comes first.' It's a living paradox, and that's what attracts me to them, a unique contradiction of being so damn independent and yet waiting on their man hand and foot. It's a bizarre combination, an intriguing one."

Despite the four collections and two previous non-Honkytonk Sue books, *Low Blows* and *Even Lower Blows*, Bell says *The Man Canyon* has been "the toughest thing I've ever attempted to do. I'm used to dealing in short bursts. I can do two pages on anything from uterus infection to the Star Wars defense system in my sleep. But to sustain 120 pages of something that makes sense and has plot is absolutely the hardest thing I've ever attempted, and if you don't believe me, ask my editors."

In *The Man Canyon*, Bell hopes to take the Honkytonk Sue character farther into the world of three dimensions. "I want to make her more believable, more real, give her more human frailty contrasted with her obvious strength. She is full of all the neuroses that every woman carries around. She doesn't think she's smart, she thinks all men want is her body, she has a scar, she loses her job and she gets pregnant much too late in her life after all those years spent trying not to get pregnant," he says. "Gee, I just hope I can make this all funny."

Bell's artistic influences include Burne (*Tarzan*) Hogarth, the Western-themed illustrators Charles Russell and Frederick Remington, and editorial cartoonist Pat Oliphant. In addition to his cartooning, he makes a living as a morning rock DJ on KSLX in Scottsdale, Arizona. He lives with his wife and two young children.

There is a big advantage in drawing a female character, Bob Bell says. "I know her nemesis inside out, because I'm part of the enemy, I'm a man. I know every male trick in the book, and it's fun to write off of that."

Comic Screen

These characters are being developed for other media. All projects are live-action unless specified. Those marked by an asterisk have changed status since last listing. **Attn: comics & media pros:** Clarifications and other info to be added to this list are cheerfully invited. Send to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Ave. South, 8th Flr., NY, NY 10016.

The Adolescent Radioactive Black Belt Hamsters. Animated series. Rankin-Bass, producers.

* **The Airtight Garage**. Moebius' SF graphic novel. Animated film from Productions Pascal Blais & Starwatcher Graphics. Pronounced unlikely due to financing delays.

The American. Film. Meltzer/Heilpern, producers.

* **American Flagg!** Film. Howard Chaykin is currently pitching studios.

* **Annie**. Separate film & Broadway musical sequels. Film to shoot April 1990. Lewis Gilbert, director. Musical reteams creators Charles Strouse, Tom Meehan & Martin Charnin & star Dorothy Loudon.

* **Ant-Man**. Film. *Not* Henry Pym, though.

Archie. Film. *Archie & Veronica*. Targeted for summer 1991. Warner Bros. Script: Jeff Boam. Joel Schumacher, director. Archie: Corey Haim. Also TV movie for NBC fall 1989. Exec producers: Tom Patchett, Andy Heyward. Animated *Archies 3000* series possible.

* **Arzach.** Film based on Moebius hero. Kirk Thatcher, producer.

The Avengers. Film. Not comics; John Steed. Mel Gibson may star. Script: Sam Hamm.

Babar. *Babar: The Movie*. Animated. In release.

* **Batman**. Film. Warner Bros. In release. Sequels planned. May film back-to-back. Cast, script, director TBA. (see articles.)

Beetle Bailey. Film. Also animated TV special. Script: Hank Saroyan.

* **Beetlejuice**. Animated Saturday a.m. series debuts ABC this fall. Nelvana/Warner Bros.

Blackhawk. Film.

Blade. Film based on *Tomb of Dracula* character. Script: Lee Goldberg & William Rabkin.

Blondie. CBS animated special.

James Bond. New 007 film, *Licence to Kill*, in release.

Betty Boop. Film. Pierre Spengler, producer. Richard Fleischer may direct.

* **Brenda Starr, Reporter**. Film starring Brooke Shields & Timothy Dalton. Release delayed due to New World sale.

* **Bugs Bunny**. *Bugs Bunny & Tweety* airs on ABC Saturdays.

COMICS REPORTER

Captain America in Yugoslavia

Art: Todd McFarlane

Captain America, Spider-Man Characters, Trademark & Copyright 1990 Marvel Entertainment Group.

Captain America **is beating** *Spider-Man* **to the movie screen. And the director's the same—Albert Pyun.**

In red, white and blue, the star-spangled hero created by Joe Simon & Jack Kirby is heading toward the silver screen. He's Captain America—and his movie is filming in Yugoslavia.

There'll be additional location tensing in Alaska and California for the film, which stars actor Matt Salinger, son of legendary author J.D. (*Catcher in the Rye*) Salinger, as Captain America (and of course, Steve Rogers).

The screenplay by Stephen Tolkin mixes and matches sequences from Cap's comics past to create a new movie "continuity." The film opens in WWII, detailing Captain America's traditional origin (weakling Steve Rogers gets a shot of serum in Operation Re-Birth from Dr. Vasari, *not* the comics' Operation Super-Soldier & Dr. Reinstein). At this time, his girl friend is Bernie (apparently derived from the character seen in the '80s comics). The Nazis develop their own super-soldier, the Red Skull (played by Scott Paulin of *The Right Stuff*). And it's the Skull (not the comics' Baron Zemo) who ties Cap to a rocket (there's no Bucky in this movie) pointed at the Arctic. Cue 40 years of suspended animation.

Explorers (not the Sub-Mariner and the Avengers as shown in *Avengers* #4) discover the frozen Cap and defrost him in 1989 (not 1964). He vaults back into action, gets involved with Bernie's daughter, Sharon (Kim Gillingham), and, naturally, battles the Red Skull for the bulk of the film.

Also in the cast are Ned (*Superman*) Beatty, Michael (*The Hidden*) Nouri, Darren (*Kolchak*) McGavin, Melinda (*Close Encounters*) Dillon and Ronny (*RoboCop*) Cox as kidnapped American president Nick Kimball.

Albert Pyun—who was supposed to direct the still-pending *Spider-Man* film (CS #4)—is directing this 21st Century production scheduled to wrap in late summer. Stan Lee (who discussed the project in CS #8) serves as executive producer with 21st Century's Menahem Golan (the former Cannon Films topper) as producer. Line producer is Tom Karnowski. Release plans are indefinite, though Christmas 1989 and spring 1990 are being considered.

—*David McDonnell*

Boris & Natasha Photo: Larry Sebastian/Copyright 1988 M.C.E.G., Inc.

Jay Ward's wacky spies come to life as Dave Thomas & Sally Kellerman. They're *Boris & Natasha*.

New TV series teaming Steven Spielberg & Warner Bros. features new young Warner characters. Now called *Tiny Toon Adventures*. Debuts fall 1990.

Bullwinkle. *Boris & Natasha*, a live-action comedy, with Sally Kellerman & Dave Thomas. Script: Charles Fradin. Charles Martin-Smith, director. Due out fall '89. Video release of *Bullwinkle* begins late '89.

* **Captain America**. Film now shooting. Script: Stephen Tolkin. Albert Pyun, director. Captain America: Matt Salinger. (see item)

Cathy. Animated TV specials on CBS. TV ads now running.

The Chameleon. New hero created by Stan Lee for TV. May appear in a Hulk TV movie.

Charlie Chan. Film.

* **Chip & Dale**. Animated series.

Rescue Rangers, already airs on Disney Channel. Debuts in syndication this fall. Film set for 1991.

Cracked. Superhero parody movie in development.

* **Crossfire**. TV pilot. ABC. Apparently "dead."

* **Daredevil**. Introduced in *Trial of Incredible Hulk*. DD: Rex Smith. Series spin-off not bought.

Deathlok. Film.

Delta Tenn. TV series to star Shannon Tweed in works.

* **Dick Tracy**. Film. Touchstone. Warren Beatty, director & star. Cast: Al Pacino, Madonna. Summer '90 release. Shooting wrapped.

DNAgents. Film. UA.

Doc Savage. Film.

* **Dr. Strange**. Film. Script: Bob Gale. Looking for studio. Separate TV movie discussed.

* **Droopy**. Animated series pilot. Hanna-Barbera for TBS.

Fantastic Four. Film. Neue Constantin. Bernard Eichinger, producer.

* **Felix the Cat**. Animated film. Release delayed by New World's sale.

* **The Fish Police**. Animated series.

* **The Flintstones**. Film. Script: Steven de Souza. Joel Silver, producer. Amblin Entertainment may now be involved.

* **Garfield**. Saturday a.m. series, *Garfield & Friends*, on CBS expands to an hour this fall. New cartoon special on primetime CBS: *Garfield's Thanksgiving*.

The Green Hornet. Film. Taft Entertainment/Keith Barish.

Green Lantern. Film. Joel Silver, producer. Being written.

* **Gumby**. Film.

* **He-Man.** *New Adventures of He-Man*, a new 65-episode series, debuts in fall 1990 from LBS Communications.

* **Honkytonk Sue**. Film. Optioned by Goldie Hawn. (see article.)

The Incredible Hulk. Next NBC TV movie airs this fall.

Iron Man. Character may be introduced in Hulk TV movie or solo *Iron Man* film.

* **The Jetsons**. Animated film. HB/Universal release now due June 1990.

Jonny Quest. Syndicated animated series. Live-action film. Fred Dekker, writer/director. Taft Entertainment/Keith Barish.

Judge Dredd. Film. Script: Tim Hunter & James Crumley. Charles Lippincott, producer.

Kaptain Keen & Ko. Planned animated series. Rankin-Bass.

Li'l Abner. Media revival. Dave Bell & Herbert Krosney, producers. Julian animated series, TV specials & musical.

Little Nemo in Slumberland. Animated film. TMS Entertainment. Summer release?

* **The Lone Ranger**. Syndicated TV series planned. Also separate live-action film. John Landis, director. Universal.

Lone Wolf & Cub. Film. Edward Pressman, producer.

MacDoodle Street. Film. Columbia. Based on Mark Alan Stamaty's *Village Voice* weekly comic strip.

MAD Magazine. CBS-TV special from Hanna-Barbera. Also series pilot.

Mai the Psychic Girl. Film. Optioned by writer/producer Larry Wilson. Co-producer: Walter Hill. With Carolco.

* **Mandrake**. Film. Julien Temple, director, trying to re-activate. May star David Bowie.

Art: Trademark & Copyright 1989 Warner Bros. Inc.

Younger Toons will have *Tiny Toon Adventures* next fall.

Mickey Mouse. New animated shorts in works.

Mr. Jigsaw. Ron Fortier-Gary Kato character optioned for animation by Rankin-Bass.

Mr. Magoo. Film. Steven Tisch, producer.

My Secret Identity. Syndicated sitcom with Ultraman renewed.

Nancy. *Nancy The Movie*. Character is to be seen in her 30s, reunited with Sluggo. Peter Muller, producer.

Neil the Horse. Animation/live-action project.

Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD. Film. Stephen Herek, director. Script: Greg Pruss.

Joe Palooka. Musical.

* **The Phantom**. Film. Bruce Sherlock, Peter Sjoquist, John Torv, Rodney Price, producers. Script: Ken Shadie. *Phantom* creator Lee Falk is consulting. Joel Schumacher *may* direct.

Plastic Man. Film. Joe Dante may direct. Separate scripts by Charles Gale & Joe Lafia. In development at Guber-Peters.

* **The Punisher**. Film. Dolph Lundgren stars. Mark Goldblatt, director. Release delayed by New World's sale. (see article.)

Radio Boy. Animated. Rankin-Bass.

Reid Fleming, World's Toughest Milkman. Film. May star Jim Belushi. Script: creator David Boswell. Matt Weisman, Joseph Loeb II, producers.

RoboCop. Sequel. Script: Frank Miller. Tim Hunter, director. Filming begins in August. Peter Weller & Nancy Allen return. Animated *Marvel Universe* may spin off its own solo series.

The Rocketeer. Film. Disney. Bill Dear, director. Script: Danny Bilson & Paul De Meo.

Roger Rabbit. New animated short "Tummy Trouble," Second short, "Rollercoaster Rabbit," in works. (see article.)

Sally Forth. Universal sitcom.

Sgt. Preston of the Yukon. TV revival projected.

Sgt. Rock. Film. Rock: Bruce Willis. John McTiernan, director. Joel Silver, producer. Steven de Souza is rewriting script.

The Shadow. Film. Script: Howard Franklin. Martin Bregman, producer.

The She-Hulk. Will co-star in Hulk TV movie to air fall, NBC.

* **The Simpsons**. Animated series debuts this fall, FBC. Spin-off from *Tracey Ullman Show* featuring Matt Groening's characters.

* **Spider-Man**. Film. Looking for *new* script & director. New announced shooting start: September. Animated *Marvel Universe* segment continues.

Sub-Mariner. Film. Storyline: Namor comes to surface to avenge Atlantis' destruction. Would film in North Carolina on *Abyss* soundstages.

Superboy. Syndicated TV series renewed. Story editor: Cary Bates.

Superman. *Superman V* film announced. Highly unlikely.

Swamp Thing. *Return of Swamp Thing* in release. Animated series.

Tales from the Crypt. HBO Cable series airing.

* **Tarzan**. TV movie, *Tarzan in Manhattan*, starred Joe Lara. Not picked up as a TV series.

* **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles**. Animated series airing will add 52 new episodes to allow daily weekday broadcast this fall. Live-action film now due summer '90. Jim Henson's Creature Shop has created "live" Turtles. (see article.)

* **Terry & the Pirates.** Film. Script: Jules Feiffer. Stan Weston, exec producer.

Thor. Animated series.

Time Beavers. Animated TV series. Kushner-Locke.

Tin-Tin. Film "on back burner" at Amblin.

Tom & Jerry. Film. Also TV series spin-off, *Tom & Jerry Kids*.

Trouble with Girls. Film.

Unlimited Powers. CBS TV series pilot with super-team of DC heroes: Dr. Occult, Blok (from *LSH*), Green Arrow's daughter & a new Flash.

* **Vampirella**. Film.

V for Vendetta. Film. Warner.

WARP. Film. Script: Mark Victor & Michael Grais, producers.

Watchmen. Film. Script: Sam Hamm. Terry Gilliam, director. Joel Silver, producer. Anton Furst, production designer. Fall shooting start in doubt.

* **Whisper**. Film. Atlantic Releasing. Vanity stars. Budget: $6 million. Fall filming will probably abort due to Atlantic's financial troubles.

Wizard of Id. Film. Script: Steven de Souza, Dana Olsen. David & Jerry Zucker to direct.

Wolverine. Film. Would end with character joining X-Men.

The X-Men. Animated TV special/series pilot to air '89-90.

* **Zen, Intergalactic Ninja**. Film. Animated series. Surge Licensing. Mark Freedman, exec producer.

Zippyvision. Film. Script: Bill Griffith & Diane Noomin. Features Zippy the Pinhead.

Zorro. Half-hour TV series. *Zorro—The Legend Continues*, co-produced by New World & France's Ellipse Programme.

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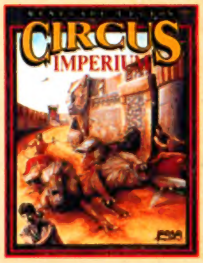

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